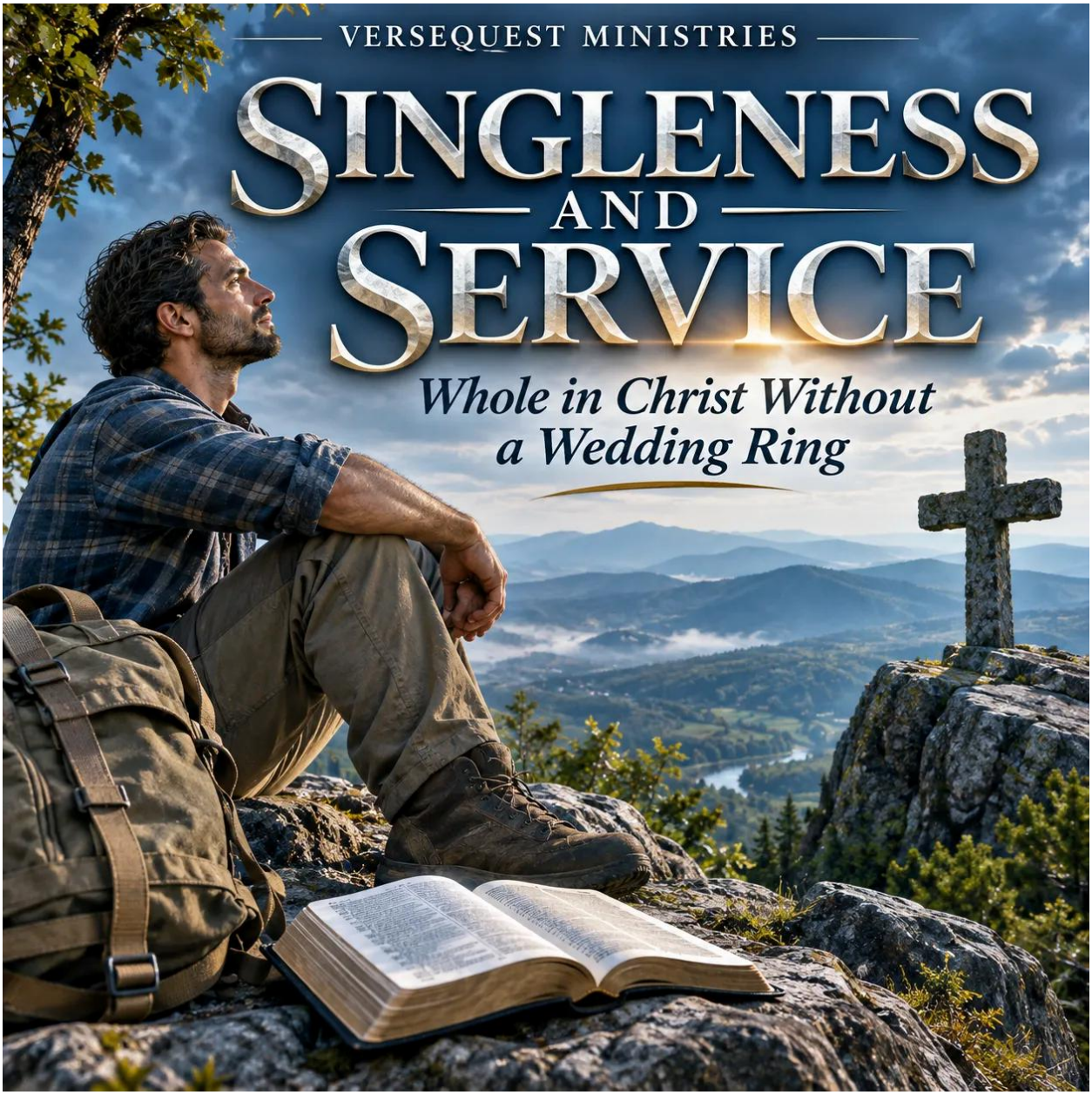
Singleness and Service

Whole in Christ Without a Wedding Ring

Series 1-10

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries




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Singleness and Service

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Singleness and Service — Whole in Christ Without a Wedding Ring

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Introduction to Singleness and Service — Whole in Christ Without a Wedding Ring

There is something terribly wrong with a religious world that can preach that a sinner is complete in Jesus Christ and then turn around and treat an unmarried Christian like a half-finished human being waiting for somebody to complete the construction. The Bible declares in Colossians 2:10, “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” That ought to settle something for anybody interested in believing what God actually said. A man does not become a complete man when somebody calls him a husband, and a woman does not become a complete woman when somebody calls her a wife. Marriage is honourable, marriage is biblical, and marriage was established by God Himself. But marriage is not salvation, sanctification, justification, or the missing ingredient in the believer's standing before the Almighty. A wedding ceremony can establish an earthly household, but it cannot improve upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, the world has spent generations measuring human worth by romantic relationships, and a surprising number of Christians have adopted that measuring stick without bothering to examine it against the Scriptures. Apparently, the blood of Christ can redeem a sinner, the Holy Ghost can seal him, and God can make him accepted in the Beloved, but somebody still thinks the poor fellow needs a wedding ring before his life amounts to anything.

Now let us establish something before the religious matchmaking committee begins sharpening its pencils. This series is not an attack upon marriage. God established marriage in Genesis 2, the Lord Jesus Christ honoured marriage during His earthly ministry, and Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” A faithful husband and wife can accomplish tremendous things for the Lord while fulfilling the responsibilities God has entrusted to their household. Marriage provides legitimate companionship, mutual assistance, physical intimacy within biblical boundaries, and opportunities for raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Nothing in these studies should be understood as diminishing those blessings. But recognizing the honour of marriage is not the same thing as declaring that every Christian must marry. The Bible never established that requirement. In fact, the very apostle God used to reveal so much doctrine concerning the Church openly discussed the advantages of remaining unmarried. First Corinthians 7:7 records Paul's words, “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” There is a statement that ought to make a few people reconsider the assumption that everybody without a spouse must be waiting for God's permission to become useful.

The apostle Paul did not consider his unmarried condition an embarrassment requiring an explanation. He recognized that remaining unmarried could provide particular opportunities for serving the Lord without certain domestic responsibilities dividing his attention. First Corinthians 7:35 identifies the objective as attending "upon the Lord without distraction." Yet Paul did not command everybody to remain single, nor did he teach that married Christians were spiritually inferior. He plainly declared in verse 28, "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned." There is the biblical balance. Marriage is lawful, and singleness can be advantageous. Both conditions carry responsibilities, both present opportunities for faithfulness, and both can be corrupted by the flesh. A married Christian may neglect his household while pretending to be devoted to ministry, and an unmarried Christian may spend decades pursuing selfish pleasures while claiming to enjoy freedom from responsibility. Neither condition automatically establishes spiritual maturity. The issue is obedience. God has never commanded every believer to possess identical earthly circumstances. He has commanded every believer to walk according to His Word. **A wedding ring does not make a Christian holy, and the absence of one does not make a Christian useless.**

There is another reason this subject deserves serious attention. Many unmarried believers have spent years listening to well-meaning people explain what must be wrong with them because they have not married. Some are young adults who desire marriage but have not found a suitable Christian partner. Others have reached middle age while watching their friends marry, raise children, and establish households. Some have deliberately remained unmarried because of particular opportunities for service, while others would gladly marry if the right circumstances developed. Still others have buried a beloved husband or wife and now face a kind of loneliness they never expected to experience again. These are not identical situations, and it is foolish to treat them as though one cheerful religious slogan can explain them all. A woman who has faithfully served the Lord unmarried for forty years does not need somebody treating her like an unfinished project. A man who has buried his wife after decades of marriage does not need somebody informing him that he should simply enjoy his newfound independence. The Church ought to possess enough biblical understanding and ordinary Christian compassion to recognize the difference. **Not everybody who lives alone arrived there by the same road, and not everybody who wears a wedding ring is walking with God.**

We must also address the legitimate desire for marriage without turning that desire into either a sin or an idol. There is nothing inherently wicked about a Christian man desiring a godly wife or a Christian woman desiring a faithful husband. God established marriage, and Scripture honours it. But a reasonable desire can become a dangerous master when obtaining it becomes more important than obeying the Lord. Some Christians compromise

doctrine because they are afraid of remaining unmarried. Others overlook serious character problems, enter unequal yokes, surrender standards of purity, or accept relationships that should have been rejected before they began. Second Corinthians 6:14 warns, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” First Thessalonians 4:3 declares, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” Those commandments do not expire because somebody has been lonely for ten years. Neither does an intention to marry eventually make sexual immorality acceptable in the meantime. The flesh will produce a thousand explanations for disobedience if somebody is foolish enough to give it an audience. **Loneliness can make compromise attractive, but it cannot make compromise righteous. Better to remain unmarried with a clear conscience than enter a relationship by abandoning the very Scriptures that were supposed to govern it.**

Then there is the matter of Christian fellowship, where some local churches have managed to create an arrangement that would be difficult to defend from First Corinthians 12. A congregation can have marriage conferences, family retreats, parenting classes, couples' banquets, and enough household activities to occupy every weekend of the year, yet somehow overlook the faithful unmarried believers sitting in its pews. The unmarried brother who teaches, gives, prays, and serves may still be treated as though he has not become a full member of respectable Christian society. The unmarried sister who spends years helping others may receive plenty of appreciation for her labour but very little genuine fellowship when the church doors close. Meanwhile, Paul declares in First Corinthians 12:27, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” The body of Christ is not a couples' club, and membership does not depend upon presenting a marriage certificate. Romans 12:10 commands believers to be “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love.” That affection should extend to widows, widowers, younger unmarried adults, older lifelong singles, married couples, and families alike. The Church is supposed to be a spiritual family, not a collection of private households that happen to occupy the same building on Sunday morning.

But unmarried Christians must also hear the other side of the matter. Being single does not grant permission to become selfish, bitter, lazy, irresponsible, or consumed with personal entertainment. First Corinthians 6:19–20 reminds believers that they are not their own because they have been bought with a price. The unmarried Christian belongs to Jesus Christ just as surely as the married Christian does. His body must be kept pure, his time must be stewarded wisely, his financial resources must be handled responsibly, and his spiritual opportunities must be taken seriously. Romans 12:11 commands, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” Some unmarried Christians possess flexibility that married believers with children and household responsibilities simply do not have.

That flexibility can become a tremendous opportunity for evangelism, Bible study, teaching, missionary support, writing, visitation, practical helps, and other forms of Christian service. Of course, not every unmarried believer possesses unlimited resources or an empty schedule. Many work long hours, care for relatives, or carry substantial obligations. Nevertheless, every Christian should examine what God has actually entrusted to him. **An undivided life is not automatically a devoted life. Freedom becomes spiritually valuable when obedience puts it to work.**

Throughout these ten studies, we will also confront the pressure that families, churches, and society sometimes place upon unmarried adults. The familiar question, "When are you getting married?" may begin as harmless curiosity, but repeated often enough it becomes a burden Scripture never imposed. Parents may sincerely desire grandchildren, relatives may want everybody settled, and church members may believe they are helping by recommending every available single person within fifty miles. Yet the Lord has not appointed these people to determine the wedding dates of His servants. First Corinthians 7:24 declares, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." That does not forbid marriage or changing one's circumstances. It establishes that Christian faithfulness does not depend upon rearranging one's earthly condition before serving the Lord. Wise counsel should be welcomed, but human pressure must never be promoted into divine authority. The fear of man bringeth a snare, according to Proverbs 29:25. A believer who marries merely to satisfy relatives may discover that the relatives go home after the wedding while he must live with the consequences of his decision. **A marriage certificate may satisfy the family, but it cannot sanctify a foolish decision.**

Perhaps the most important distinction in this entire series concerns the difference between earthly companionship and eternal completeness. A spouse may provide love, assistance, affection, friendship, and the blessings of a shared household. Those are valuable gifts, but no husband or wife can become the foundation of another sinner's redemption. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, not of works. Ephesians 1:6 declares that God has made believers "accepted in the beloved." The Christian's standing before God is established through Jesus Christ, not through earthly achievements. Nor does that spiritual completeness mean the believer never experiences loneliness or desires companionship. Hebrews 13:5 contains the Lord's promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." That promise does not guarantee an earthly spouse, but it establishes something greater than human companionship can provide. People may disappoint us, relationships may change, and death may separate loved ones for the remainder of earthly life. The Lord remains faithful. **An empty house does not mean an empty salvation, and an unanswered desire does not mean an absent God.**

Finally, we must look beyond this present life, because the Christian who makes earthly marriage the ultimate purpose of existence has failed to consider what Jesus Christ actually revealed about eternity. In Matthew 22:30, answering the Sadducees concerning resurrection, the Lord declared, “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” Earthly marriage is honourable, but its present arrangement does not continue unchanged in resurrection. Ephesians 5:32 reveals the great mystery concerning Christ and His Church, while Revelation 19:7 announces, “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” The Church's relationship to Jesus Christ is infinitely greater than any earthly relationship used to illustrate it. The believer's future includes resurrection, glorification, and everlasting fellowship with the Lord. Second Corinthians 5:10 also establishes that Christians must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give account for the things done in their bodies. That future accounting ought to settle the importance of faithful stewardship. **God will not judge Christian usefulness by counting wedding anniversaries. He will examine the life entrusted to each believer and the faithfulness demonstrated in serving Him.**

These ten essays will therefore examine singleness and service from the foundation of biblical doctrine to the practical responsibilities of everyday Christian living. We will deal with completeness in Christ, Paul's teaching concerning unmarried believers, loneliness and contentment, the legitimate desire for marriage, sexual purity, Christian fellowship, family pressure, opportunities for service, widowhood and loss, and the eternal relationship between Christ and His redeemed Church. We will not pretend that every unmarried Christian is delighted with his circumstances, nor will we accept the foolish idea that a person cannot live a meaningful life without a spouse. We will honour marriage where Scripture honours it, defend Christian liberty where Scripture grants it, condemn immorality where Scripture condemns it, and emphasize faithful service wherever the Word of God requires it. The purpose is not to establish a competition between married and unmarried believers. It is to restore the proper biblical standard by which both must live. The married Christian belongs to Jesus Christ. The unmarried Christian belongs to Jesus Christ. Both must walk according to His Word, and both will eventually answer to Him.

So whether you have never married, desire marriage, prefer remaining unmarried, have lost a beloved spouse, or find yourself single again through circumstances you never anticipated, this study concerns you. Your earthly circumstances do not excuse disobedience, and they do not determine your spiritual worth. If the Lord provides a suitable marriage, receive that blessing honourably and fulfil the responsibilities accompanying it. If marriage never comes, do not spend your years believing that real life

has failed to begin. Open your Bible, learn sound doctrine, maintain your purity, cultivate godly fellowship, give the gospel to lost sinners, strengthen the brethren, and faithfully occupy the place God has permitted you to stand. There is work to be done, souls to be reached, truth to be proclaimed, and a Saviour whose coming draws nearer with every passing day. One day the opportunities of this earthly life will be finished, and the things that seemed so important will be measured against eternity. **You are not half a Christian waiting for a husband or wife to make you whole. If you are saved, you are complete in Jesus Christ. A wedding ring may change your earthly circumstances, but it cannot add anything to the redemption purchased by His blood. Marriage is a blessing, singleness is not a disgrace, and the greatest privilege any sinner can possess is not being called somebody's husband or wife. It is belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 of 10 — Singleness and Service — Complete in Christ: You Are Not Half a Person Waiting for a Spouse

Key Passage — Colossians 2:10 (KJV): "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"

Introduction

There is something mighty peculiar about a religious crowd that will preach salvation by grace on Sunday morning and spend the rest of the week treating an unmarried Christian like an unfinished product waiting for somebody to complete the assembly. The Bible says, "And ye are complete in him," but apparently that statement needs an amendment from the marriage committee. According to some folks, a man does not really become a man until somebody calls him a husband, and a woman has not quite arrived until somebody calls her a wife. Never mind that the blood of Jesus Christ has redeemed the sinner, the Holy Ghost has sealed the believer, and God Almighty has made him accepted in the Beloved. There must still be something missing because nobody has bought a wedding cake. What astonishing theology! The apostle Paul did not write Colossians 2:10 to married Christians only. He addressed believers whose sufficiency rested entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ. A marriage certificate can establish a lawful earthly relationship, but it cannot add one ounce of righteousness to the finished work of Calvary. A wedding ring may change your circumstances, but it cannot improve your standing in the Saviour who has already made you complete.

We live in a world that has turned personal relationships into measurements of human worth, and the tragedy is that some Christians have swallowed the same foolishness

without bothering to examine the label. The world says you are somebody when somebody wants you, successful when somebody admires you, and complete when somebody promises to spend the rest of life with you. Then a well-meaning church member comes along and baptizes that philosophy in religious language. The young woman who has never married becomes an object of pity. The young man who has remained single becomes a problem awaiting investigation. The older unmarried believer is approached with sympathetic expressions usually reserved for someone whose house just burned down. Meanwhile, the unmarried Christian who is studying his Bible, winning souls, supporting missionaries, helping others, and faithfully attending his local church is treated as though his life has not officially begun. That is not Bible Christianity. That is social convention masquerading as spiritual discernment. A person can wear a wedding ring and be as spiritually barren as a dead tree, while another can wear no ring at all and bear fruit that will remain throughout eternity.

Now understand something from the beginning: this is not an argument against marriage. God established marriage, Scripture honours marriage, and a Christian has no business despising an institution established by the Creator Himself. Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” That settles the matter for anybody interested in believing the Bible. But there is a considerable difference between honouring something God established and making it a requirement God never commanded. Marriage is honourable; it is not redemptive. Marriage is a blessing; it is not the new birth. Marriage brings responsibilities, companionship, and opportunities for service; it does not supply an additional portion of Jesus Christ to somebody who was spiritually incomplete before the ceremony. We must reject two equally foolish extremes: the religious notion that everybody ought to marry and the modern celebration of selfish independence that treats marriage as an unnecessary inconvenience. Neither deserves the Christian's allegiance. The question is not whether a person has a husband or wife. The question is whether that person belongs to Jesus Christ and is faithfully serving Him.

1. The Bible Says Complete, Not Almost Complete

Colossians 2:8 opens with a warning that deserves considerably more attention than it usually receives: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Notice the danger. Paul is warning Christians against being taken captive by ideas originating with men rather than with Jesus Christ. These religious and philosophical systems promise something beyond what the believer possesses in his Saviour. They manufacture deficiencies, invent requirements, and persuade people that Christ alone is somehow insufficient. Then Paul delivers the answer in verses 9 and 10: “For in him dwelleth all the

fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." There is no hesitation in that language. The fullness is in Christ, and the believer's completeness is in Christ. Not in a church organization, not in religious traditions, not in human philosophy, and certainly not in matrimonial achievement. When the Bible says complete, the sentence does not require a committee of unmarried people's relatives to explain why it really means almost complete.

Consider what follows in the chapter. Colossians 2:11 speaks of a circumcision made without hands, verse 12 concerns identification with Christ in His burial and resurrection, and verse 13 declares that God has quickened believers together with Him, "having forgiven you all trespasses." Verse 14 speaks of the handwriting of ordinances being blotted out through the work of Christ. These are doctrinal realities connected to salvation, identification with the Saviour, and the spiritual work God performs in the believer. Paul is not discussing emotional satisfaction, romantic compatibility, or the comforts of domestic companionship. He is establishing the sufficiency of Jesus Christ against religious systems that attempt to supplement Him. That distinction is essential. To say that a Christian is complete in Christ does not mean he has every earthly experience, possesses every spiritual virtue in practice, or never needs the companionship of others. It means his standing before God rests in a complete Saviour and a sufficient redemption. Do not take a verse about spiritual completeness and empty it of doctrine merely to manufacture a comforting slogan.

There is also a distinction between the believer's position and his practical condition. A Christian is complete in Christ, but he is not necessarily mature in his conduct. He may still struggle with the flesh, neglect prayer, misunderstand Scripture, or fail in obedience. Philippians 3:12 records Paul saying, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." Yet the same apostle taught the completeness of believers in Colossians 2:10. There is no contradiction. Positional completeness concerns what God has accomplished in Christ; practical growth concerns the believer's continuing responsibility to walk according to that standing. Marriage does not eliminate that responsibility. An immature bachelor can become an immature husband between Saturday afternoon and Saturday evening, and the preacher who performs the ceremony has not performed a miracle of sanctification. Likewise, an unmarried Christian may possess greater spiritual maturity than someone who has been married for decades. Spiritual growth comes through obedience to God's Word, not through exchanging vows. The Lord never appointed a wedding ceremony to accomplish the work of the Holy Ghost.

2. Salvation Does Not Come with a Wedding Certificate

Ephesians 2:8–9 declares, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” That settles the basis of salvation. A sinner is not justified by being morally respectable, entering a marriage, raising a family, joining a church, or accumulating religious accomplishments. Salvation is God's gift, received through faith in Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies the gospel concerning Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection the third day. The foundation is the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If a man trusts Christ while unmarried, God does not issue him provisional salvation until he eventually finds a wife. If a woman believes the gospel and remains unmarried throughout her earthly life, she does not receive a reduced portion of redemption. The blood that redeemed the married believer is the same blood that redeemed the unmarried believer. Heaven does not offer a two-tier salvation package, with full benefits reserved for people who managed to make it down the wedding aisle.

Ephesians 1:6 declares that God “hath made us accepted in the beloved.” That acceptance is found in Jesus Christ. Verse 7 continues, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Read those words carefully. Acceptance, redemption, forgiveness, and grace are all connected to the Saviour. There is no mention of a spouse as a supplementary requirement. The believer does not obtain a better standing before God because he has somebody beside him in the church pew. Neither does he lose his standing because he returns home to an empty house. Romans 8:1 declares, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The believer's deliverance from condemnation rests upon his position in Christ, not upon the condition of his earthly relationships. A marriage can bring wonderful companionship, but companionship cannot accomplish justification. You may need another person to help carry your groceries. You do not need another person to help Jesus Christ finish saving your soul.

Second Corinthians 5:17 states, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” There is the Christian's fundamental identity. He is a new creature in Christ. He has been regenerated, brought into a new spiritual relationship, and made a member of Christ's body. First Corinthians 12:13 explains that believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body. That spiritual operation is not dependent upon marital status. A saved husband is a new creature. A saved wife is a new creature. A saved bachelor is a new creature. A saved widow is a new creature. The earthly circumstances may differ enormously, but the spiritual foundation remains the same. The world has categories for married, unmarried, divorced, and widowed, and those distinctions can matter in practical life. Yet none establishes the means by which a sinner

enters the body of Christ. The Christian's first identity is not husband, wife, bachelor, or widow. It is redeemed sinner, accepted in Jesus Christ.

3. God Established Marriage Without Commanding Everybody to Marry

Genesis 2:18 records the LORD God's words concerning Adam: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” God then formed the woman and brought her unto the man, establishing the institution of marriage before sin entered the human race. Genesis 2:24 declares that a man shall leave his father and mother, cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh. This is not a human invention or an arrangement manufactured by civilization. Marriage came from God. Nevertheless, people have managed to turn Genesis 2:18 into something it never said. They read that it was not good for Adam to be alone and conclude that every unmarried Christian must therefore be living in a defective condition. That is not exposition; that is lifting a statement out of its historical setting and stretching it until it fits a preconceived argument. Adam stood at the beginning of human history, before the woman had been created, with a divine command concerning fruitfulness and multiplication. His situation was unique. The passage establishes God's provision for marriage, not a universal accusation against every believer who remains single.

The New Testament makes this distinction unmistakable. First Corinthians 7:7 records Paul saying, “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” Verse 8 adds, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.” Now consider what happens if somebody insists that Genesis 2:18 means all unmarried people must be living contrary to God's design. He must then explain why an inspired apostle could recommend remaining unmarried in certain circumstances. The Holy Ghost did not forget Genesis when inspiring Corinthians. The passages address different questions and circumstances. Marriage is God's established institution, and remaining unmarried can also be an entirely lawful condition for Christian service. Paul does not command everybody to remain single. He acknowledges different gifts and responsibilities. Verse 9 recognizes marriage as appropriate for those who cannot contain. The Bible has no contradiction here, although religious tradition occasionally manufactures one by refusing to read the entire counsel of God.

First Timothy 4:1–3 warns of doctrines associated with departing from the faith, including “Forbidding to marry.” That is a serious warning against religious systems that impose celibacy as though marriage were inherently impure or spiritually inferior. Hebrews 13:4, on the other hand, declares marriage honourable. Yet neither passage teaches that every person must marry. A Christian who despises marriage because he wants freedom from

responsibility is wrong. A Christian who condemns singleness because he thinks everybody ought to marry is equally wrong. One is trying to escape God's design; the other is trying to extend God's commandment beyond what He actually said. The Bible does not need assistance from either crowd. Marriage requires faithfulness, sacrifice, mutual responsibility, and obedience. Singleness requires purity, stewardship, self-government, and obedience. Different circumstances do not cancel the universal obligation to serve God. There is no commandment requiring every Christian to marry, and there is no commandment permitting unmarried Christians to live selfishly. The Lord expects obedience from both.

4. The Perfect Man Never Needed an Earthly Wife

There is one Man who lived on this earth without sin, fulfilled the Father's will perfectly, demonstrated complete obedience, and accomplished everything He came to do. That Man is Jesus Christ, and Scripture records no earthly marriage in His life. Hebrews 4:15 declares that He was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” First Peter 2:22 says, “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.” Luke 2:49 records His words, “wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” From His childhood through His earthly ministry, His life was directed toward the will of the Father. He did not need an earthly wife to establish His perfection, prove His masculinity, or accomplish His divine mission. Of course, Jesus Christ is not merely an admirable unmarried man. He is God manifest in the flesh, Israel's promised Messiah, and the sinless Saviour of the world. Nevertheless, His unmarried earthly life makes nonsense of the sweeping claim that an unmarried man must necessarily be incomplete.

Consider the Lord's conduct toward others. He showed compassion to the multitudes, cared for the afflicted, instructed His disciples, received children, dealt mercifully with repentant sinners, and exposed hypocrites who used religion to conceal corruption. In John 19:26–27, while suffering upon the cross, He made provision for His mother's care through the disciple whom He loved. His unmarried condition did not make Him incapable of love, compassion, responsibility, or meaningful relationships. He demonstrated those qualities without ever entering an earthly marriage. At the wedding in Cana, recorded in John 2, He honoured the occasion with His presence and performed His first recorded miracle. He did not despise marriage merely because His mission did not include marrying. That distinction is worth remembering. A person can honour an institution without personally entering it. A Christian can rejoice when others marry without believing that his own life is somehow deficient. The Lord Jesus Christ was never less than the perfect Man because His earthly ministry did not include a wife.

The apostle Paul's life supplies another important example. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul writes as an unmarried man and explains the particular advantages that condition may offer in attending upon the Lord. He preached Christ, suffered persecution, planted churches, instructed believers, defended sound doctrine, and endured hardships that would have tested any household. His ministry was not made worthless by the absence of a wife. Yet Scripture also records that Peter had a wife, as Matthew 8:14 indicates by mentioning his wife's mother. First Corinthians 9:5 acknowledges that other apostles exercised the right to be accompanied by a wife. Both circumstances existed among servants of God. Peter's marriage did not disqualify him, and Paul's unmarried condition did not disqualify him. The issue was faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Anybody who insists that marriage is the universal qualification for spiritual usefulness will have considerable difficulty explaining the ministries recorded in the New Testament. God apparently accomplished a great deal through men who did not all share identical domestic arrangements. Perhaps we ought to permit the Lord the same freedom today.

5. Stop Measuring Christians with the World's Yardstick

One of the most irritating habits in Christian fellowship is the tendency to treat unmarried adults as though they are still waiting for their lives to receive official approval. Somebody can teach Sunday school, support missionaries, care for elderly parents, help struggling families, and faithfully serve a local church for twenty years, yet the first question some people ask is whether he has found somebody special. Imagine applying that kind of foolish measurement to the apostle Paul. A man who preached before kings, suffered imprisonment, endured beatings, and wrote inspired Scripture would apparently need to explain why he had not settled down. The absurdity ought to be obvious. Romans 12:10 commands believers to be “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” That applies to brothers and sisters regardless of marital status. The local church is the body of Christ, not a country club organized around wedding anniversaries. Every saved believer has a place in that body, and every member deserves proper Christian regard.

First Corinthians 12:18 declares, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” Paul is explaining the composition and mutual dependence of the body of Christ. The Church is not a collection of socially successful people who have satisfied an earthly checklist. It is a spiritual body composed of believers whom God has placed together. Some members are married, some unmarried, some widowed, some young, and some old. Different abilities, responsibilities, and opportunities exist among them. Verse 21 declares that the eye cannot say unto the hand, “I have no need of thee.” Yet Christians sometimes communicate precisely that attitude when they

overlook unmarried believers or treat their service as less valuable. A faithful unmarried woman may have more biblical knowledge and spiritual judgment than many married people who spend their evenings watching television while their Bibles gather dust. A faithful unmarried man may demonstrate greater responsibility than somebody who possesses the title of husband but neglects the duties that accompany it. Marriage is not a certificate of spiritual superiority.

The unmarried believer, however, must guard against making the same mistake in reverse. It is possible to become so irritated by social pressure that singleness itself becomes a badge of superiority. Then the unmarried Christian starts speaking as though married people are hopelessly distracted, burdened, or incapable of serious service. That is fleshly pride, not biblical wisdom. Romans 12:3 warns against thinking of oneself more highly than one ought to think. Galatians 6:3 adds, “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” The married believer should not despise the unmarried believer, and the unmarried believer should not despise the married believer. Both must answer to Jesus Christ. We are not called to construct a hierarchy of spiritual importance based upon domestic arrangements. We are called to love the brethren, honour legitimate responsibilities, and serve the Lord faithfully. The church needs fewer social rankings and more open Bibles. God never commanded His people to compete over whose circumstances make them most important.

6. Being Complete in Christ Is Not Permission to Be Selfish

Now there is another side to this matter, and it deserves a firm word. Some unmarried people have taken the language of independence and turned it into a religious excuse for living entirely for themselves. They want no obligations, no interference, no accountability, and no inconvenience. Their schedule belongs to pleasure, their money belongs to appetite, and their decisions revolve around whatever makes life most comfortable. Then they announce that they are complete without anybody else. That may sound impressive in a modern speech about personal freedom, but it is not the teaching of the New Testament. First Corinthians 6:19–20 declares, “ye are not your own” and “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” A believer may be unmarried, but he is not independent of Jesus Christ. The Saviour did not redeem anybody so that the redeemed could spend the remainder of life worshipping personal convenience. The absence of a spouse removes certain earthly obligations; it does not remove the Christian's obligation to obey God.

Romans 12:1 calls believers to present their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” A living sacrifice is not somebody who makes an occasional appearance at church when nothing more interesting is happening. It is a

believer whose life has been yielded to the Lord. An unmarried Christian may possess opportunities that married believers, because of legitimate family responsibilities, cannot pursue as readily. Those opportunities should be considered seriously. Time can be invested in Bible study, evangelism, missionary support, visiting the sick, helping the elderly, discipling younger believers, and serving the local congregation. Financial resources can be managed for God's glory rather than swallowed by an endless appetite for entertainment and possessions. Freedom from some responsibilities should create opportunities for other responsibilities. A man who has no wife to care for does not thereby receive permission to care for nobody. A woman without a husband is not excused from Christian service. The Lord did not give His people liberty so they could make comfortable little kingdoms for their flesh.

First Corinthians 7:32–35 discusses the practical advantages that unmarried believers may possess in attending upon the Lord without certain domestic distractions. Paul does not teach that every unmarried person automatically becomes spiritually devoted. Freedom can be wasted just as easily as it can be used. A bachelor can spend thirty years chasing recreation and accomplish nothing lasting for Christ. A single woman can become consumed with worldly ambition and neglect the things of God. On the other hand, either may invest those years in service that bears fruit long after their earthly life has ended. Nor should churches exploit unmarried members by assuming they must be available for every task simply because they have no spouse. Stewardship involves wisdom, proper responsibilities, and faithful use of time. The objective is service to Christ, not slavery to everybody else's demands. The important question is what a believer does with the opportunities God has entrusted to him. A life may be crowded with activity and still be empty of eternal value. The Christian must learn to distinguish busyness from faithfulness.

7. The Final Accounting Will Not Be About Wedding Rings

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” This is a sobering passage concerning the accountability of believers before their Lord. It is not the Great White Throne judgment of the unsaved described in Revelation 20. The Judgment Seat of Christ concerns those who belong to the Saviour and the evaluation of their earthly conduct and service. First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that Christian works will be tested, with reward or loss resulting according to their character. Salvation remains grounded in Jesus Christ, but service is not therefore insignificant. Consider what that means for the subject before us. God is not going to evaluate Christian faithfulness by asking whether somebody managed to obtain a spouse. Marriage carries responsibilities for those who enter it, and they will answer for their

conduct within those responsibilities. Unmarried Christians will answer for their own opportunities and obligations. The Lord's judgment will be righteous, not influenced by the social expectations that so often govern human opinion.

There is another truth that ought to correct our priorities. In Matthew 22:30, answering the Sadducees concerning the resurrection, Jesus Christ declared, “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” The immediate setting concerns a question about resurrection and successive earthly marriages, and it must be understood accordingly. Nevertheless, the Lord plainly distinguishes the resurrected condition from the present earthly institution of marriage. Marriage belongs to our present order of human relationships. It is honourable, important, and worthy of faithful stewardship, but it is not the eternal foundation of the believer's standing before God. Ephesians 5:32 speaks of the great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, while Revelation 19:7 announces the marriage of the Lamb. Those passages direct attention toward the ultimate relationship between the Saviour and His redeemed people. Earthly marriage can illustrate profound spiritual truth, but it is not the source of that truth. The earthly picture must never be exalted above the heavenly reality.

This perspective should settle a great deal of unnecessary anxiety. If God grants an unmarried Christian a faithful spouse, he should receive that blessing with thanksgiving and enter marriage according to the Scriptures. If marriage does not come, he must not conclude that life has failed or that God has withheld the possibility of meaningful service. Philippians 1:21 records Paul's words, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” That is a remarkable statement from a man whose life was devoted to the Saviour rather than organized around acquiring an earthly relationship. His purpose was not to satisfy every personal desire before departing this world. His purpose was to glorify Christ. That ought to be the purpose of every believer. The unmarried Christian does not have to postpone obedience until the wedding day. The married Christian must not allow domestic blessings to replace devotion to the Lord. Both need to redeem the time, for earthly opportunities will not remain forever. The question is not whether life unfolds according to personal expectations, but whether Jesus Christ is honoured in the life actually given.

Conclusion

The Bible never promised every Christian an earthly spouse, and nobody has the authority to manufacture that promise on God's behalf. Some believers marry young, others marry later, some remain unmarried throughout life, and others face widowhood or circumstances they never expected. Those differences are real, and they may bring blessings, difficulties, opportunities, and disappointments. Scripture does not require us to pretend otherwise. But the Christian's completeness in Christ remains unchanged by those

circumstances. Colossians 2:10 does not become false when a man returns to an empty house or when a woman watches another friend walk down the wedding aisle. The verse still says, “And ye are complete in him.” That is not an invitation to deny the desire for companionship or to despise marriage. It is a command to recognize where spiritual completeness is actually found. Feelings may rise and fall, circumstances may change, and human expectations may disappoint, but the sufficiency of Jesus Christ does not fluctuate with the condition of an earthly relationship.

Neither should this doctrine produce laziness, selfishness, bitterness, or contempt for those whose circumstances differ from our own. A Christian belongs to Jesus Christ, and that relationship brings obligations as well as blessings. Married believers must honour their vows, love their spouses, and fulfil their biblical responsibilities. Unmarried believers must maintain purity, exercise good stewardship, cultivate godly fellowship, and faithfully serve the Lord. Both must resist the flesh, study the Scriptures, pray, witness, and walk according to the Word of God. There is no special exemption from holiness for those who have not married, and there is no automatic promotion to spiritual maturity for those who have. The Christian life is not measured by the possession of a spouse but by faithfulness to the Saviour. A wedding ring can identify an earthly covenant, but it cannot testify that its wearer has obeyed the Lord. The most impressive thing about a Christian should never be the arrangement of his household. It should be the evidence that Jesus Christ rules his life.

So if you are unmarried, stop allowing the world's measuring stick to determine the value of the life God has entrusted to you. Do not spend your years sitting in a spiritual waiting room, imagining that meaningful obedience must begin after a wedding ceremony. Open your Bible. Learn sound doctrine. Maintain your purity. Serve your local church. Help somebody who cannot repay you. Give the gospel to a lost sinner. Support the work of God. Use your time wisely, and remain willing to receive marriage if the Lord provides that opportunity within the boundaries of His Word. If you are married, thank God for your spouse and never use that blessing as a reason to look down upon those who are not. The Church needs faithful Christians, not another ranking system based on wedding invitations. One day every earthly achievement will be weighed against eternity, and the opinions of this world will amount to very little. What will matter is our relationship to Jesus Christ and our faithfulness to His Word. You are not half a person waiting for somebody to make you whole. **If you are saved, you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and God has already declared you complete in Him. No wedding ring can improve upon that verdict.**

2 of 10 — Singleness and Service — The Gift Nobody Wants to Discuss: What Paul Really Said About Being Unmarried

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 7:7 (KJV): "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that."

Introduction

There is a chapter in your King James Bible that has caused considerable discomfort among people who have convinced themselves that every Christian is supposed to get married, settle down, raise a family, and fit neatly into the same domestic arrangement. That chapter is 1 Corinthians 7, and the uncomfortable fellow responsible for writing it is the apostle Paul. In verse 7 he makes a statement that would probably get him removed from the planning committee of the average Christian marriage conference: "For I would that all men were even as I myself." Imagine that! The man God used to reveal the great doctrines of justification, the Church, the believer's position in Christ, and the blessed hope of the Rapture actually speaks favourably of remaining unmarried. Apparently, somebody forgot to inform Paul that a man cannot become a respectable Christian until he has acquired a wife, a mortgage, and a family portrait over the fireplace. Yet Paul was not attacking marriage, promoting irresponsibility, or establishing some religious order of unmarried spiritual celebrities. He was teaching Christians how to serve God faithfully in the circumstances where they stood.

The trouble is that people have an extraordinary talent for reading one half of a Bible passage while ignoring the other half. Some read Paul's favourable statements concerning singleness and decide marriage must be a spiritual inconvenience reserved for Christians who cannot manage a higher calling. Others read the passages honouring marriage and conclude that remaining unmarried must indicate some deficiency in character, maturity, or devotion. Both groups have managed to miss what the Holy Ghost actually said. Paul neither commanded every Christian to remain unmarried nor commanded every Christian to marry. He recognized that God had given different gifts, permitted different lawful conditions, and established responsibilities appropriate to each. He also understood something that modern Christianity desperately needs to recover: the object of the Christian life is not the achievement of a particular domestic arrangement. The object is faithful service to Jesus Christ. A wedding ring cannot substitute for obedience, and its absence does not prevent obedience. God has not authorized believers to turn personal circumstances into universal commandments.

First Corinthians 7 must be studied as Scripture, not as ammunition for somebody's preferred social arrangement. Paul is writing to the Corinthian church, a congregation

surrounded by the moral corruption of its city and already troubled by serious questions involving fornication, marriage, separation, and Christian conduct. His teaching belongs within the doctrinal instruction given to believers in the present dispensation of grace. It must not be confused with Israel's national promises under the law, nor should it be reduced to a collection of romantic suggestions suitable for greeting cards. Paul addresses actual problems, distinguishes instructions according to their circumstances, and explains why some believers may serve the Lord with fewer domestic distractions. He also makes it unmistakably clear that marriage is lawful and honourable. The chapter is not an advertisement for compulsory celibacy or a commandment to find a spouse immediately. It is an inspired explanation of Christian liberty, responsibility, purity, and service. The question is whether we are willing to let the Bible speak without forcing it to endorse our favourite arrangement.

1. The Corinthians Had Questions, and Paul Had Answers

The chapter opens with words that are frequently overlooked: “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me” (1 Corinthians 7:1). Paul is responding to matters the Corinthians themselves had raised. That introductory statement is important because the chapter contains several related questions rather than one sweeping declaration concerning all unmarried people everywhere. The apostle begins by addressing physical relationships and the proper place of marriage. He writes, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” and immediately proceeds to recognize the reality of fornication and the lawful provision of marriage. Verse 2 declares, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” There is no endorsement of immorality in Paul's favourable view of singleness. He does not tell unmarried people to enjoy the privileges of marriage without accepting its responsibilities. The Bible has no arrangement for pretending to be married while avoiding the covenant. God's standards do not become optional merely because somebody has strong desires and a convenient explanation.

Verses 3–5 continue with instructions concerning the mutual obligations of husbands and wives. Paul recognizes that marriage involves responsibilities extending beyond companionship, emotional satisfaction, and public recognition. The husband and wife have duties toward one another, and neither is authorized to use spiritual pretensions as an excuse for neglecting the other. Notice the balance. The apostle who speaks favourably of remaining unmarried also defends the proper physical relationship within marriage. He is not describing marriage as unclean or suggesting that holiness requires married people to behave as though they were unmarried. Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” The same God who commands sexual purity outside marriage

honours the lawful relationship within it. There is nothing spiritual about despising what God has established. Nor is there anything honourable about using marriage as a cover for selfishness. Paul is dealing with real Christian responsibilities, not composing a speech for religious people who want to congratulate themselves for avoiding ordinary human obligations.

Then comes verse 6: “But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.” That statement begins to introduce an important distinction running throughout the chapter. Paul recognizes that not every lawful arrangement is a universal requirement. Marriage is permitted and honourable, but the Christian is not automatically commanded to enter it. In verse 7 Paul expresses his desire that others could remain as he was, while immediately acknowledging that different people possess different gifts from God. This is where many interpretations begin running off the road. One crowd turns Paul's preference into a command against marriage. Another treats his preference as though it were an embarrassing personal opinion that ought to be hidden from respectable church members. Neither approach respects the text. Paul was perfectly capable of defending marriage and recommending singleness without contradicting himself. The difficulty is not in the Bible. The difficulty is in people who insist that every Christian must follow the same earthly course before God can be pleased.

2. Every Man Hath His Proper Gift of God

First Corinthians 7:7 deserves to be examined word by word: “For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.” Paul begins by expressing a preference and immediately qualifies it by recognizing different gifts. The word “But” is important. It prevents the first statement from being transformed into a universal commandment. Paul could desire that others enjoy the advantages of his own unmarried condition without insisting that everybody possessed the same ability, circumstances, or responsibilities. The expression “his proper gift of God” establishes that the differences Paul recognizes are not necessarily moral failures or spiritual defects. God has not made every Christian identical. That ought to settle something, although human beings seem determined to manufacture a single approved pattern and then measure everybody against it. The Lord knows the difference between His commandments and our preferences, even when we have forgotten it.

Now do not invent something the passage never says. Paul does not define the gift of remaining unmarried as a mysterious condition in which every natural desire for marriage permanently disappears. Neither does he promise that every unmarried person will remain unmarried throughout life. The text recognizes different gifts; it does not provide a detailed classification system by which Christians can examine their feelings and receive a

certificate announcing their permanent domestic destiny. Some believers possess a settled desire and practical ability to remain unmarried. Others desire marriage and may properly enter it. Circumstances can change, and the chapter itself addresses those changes. It is foolish to tell a young Christian that the mere fact of being unmarried proves God has permanently forbidden marriage. It is equally foolish to insist that anyone who occasionally desires companionship must be incapable of serving God faithfully while single. A gift from God is not an excuse to manufacture revelations He never gave. Where Scripture speaks, we should speak. Where Scripture remains silent, we should avoid supplying additional commandments.

Verse 8 continues, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.” There is an unmistakably positive judgment concerning remaining unmarried. Paul does not apologize for it, and the Holy Ghost did not inspire an embarrassed footnote explaining that the apostle was temporarily confused. Yet verse 9 immediately adds, “But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” The contrast is straightforward. Paul recognizes the lawful place of marriage where sexual desire presents a serious temptation to immorality. The burning under discussion concerns passion, not an automatic sentence to hell for somebody who remains unmarried. Nor does Paul teach that marriage is merely a convenient arrangement for people who cannot behave themselves. Other passages establish its broader divine purposes. Here he addresses a practical concern relevant to the Corinthian situation. The Christian must not romanticize singleness, despise marriage, or treat sexual temptation as harmless. God's gifts do not cancel God's commandments, and Christian liberty never includes permission to commit fornication.

3. A Commandment Is Not the Same Thing as Apostolic Counsel

One of the most important distinctions in 1 Corinthians 7 concerns the difference between a commandment and counsel given regarding particular circumstances. In verses 10–11 Paul addresses married believers and writes, “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord.” He then gives instruction concerning separation and reconciliation. In verse 12 he says, “But to the rest speak I, not the Lord,” before addressing believers married to unbelieving spouses. Some people have taken this distinction and reached the astonishing conclusion that certain portions of the chapter are uninspired personal opinions that can be accepted or discarded according to preference. That will not do. Paul is distinguishing between instruction already given by the Lord during His earthly ministry and the additional apostolic instruction he is delivering concerning circumstances not directly addressed in that earlier teaching. The entire epistle remains part of inspired Scripture. First Corinthians

14:37 plainly identifies Paul's writings as “the commandments of the Lord.” You cannot discard apostolic instruction merely because it interferes with your preferred explanation.

The distinction appears again in verse 25: “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.” Notice Paul's honesty and precision. He does not pretend that the Lord had issued a universal commandment requiring all unmarried people to remain unmarried. He gives his judgment concerning a particular situation and explains the considerations behind it. Verse 26 identifies “the present distress” as an important factor. Verse 28 then states plainly that marrying is not sin. Paul's judgment is not meaningless, uninspired speculation; it is authoritative apostolic counsel preserved in God's Word, carefully distinguished from a universal command. That distinction matters. There are commandments requiring obedience, and there are lawful decisions requiring wisdom within biblical boundaries. A Christian may marry without violating Paul's counsel, and another may remain unmarried while following the advantages Paul describes. The mistake comes when someone takes counsel suited to particular circumstances and converts it into a law binding every believer.

At the end of the chapter, verse 40 declares concerning a widow, “But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.” Do not mistake Paul's wording for uncertainty about whether he belongs to the Lord or possesses divine authority. He is expressing his apostolic judgment while emphasizing the spiritual character of his counsel. In 1 Corinthians 7:39 he has already established that a widow is free to marry after her husband's death, “only in the Lord.” Thus Paul can recognize the liberty to remarry while also judging that remaining unmarried may be preferable under the considerations he has discussed. Those two statements belong together. A widow who lawfully remarries has not rebelled against Scripture. A widow who remains unmarried has not failed to complete her earthly responsibilities. The Bible gives liberty where God gives liberty. Religious people who manufacture additional prohibitions are not displaying superior holiness. They are simply writing commandments that the Holy Ghost never authorized.

4. The Present Distress and the Shortness of Time

First Corinthians 7:26 declares, “I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be.” There is a historical and practical consideration that must not be overlooked. Paul is writing to first-century Christians facing circumstances that could make marriage and domestic responsibilities particularly difficult. The precise nature of the distress is not fully described in the chapter, and there is no reason to manufacture a detailed historical account that the passage itself does not

provide. The important point is that circumstances can affect the wisdom of a lawful decision without changing the moral character of that decision. Marriage remains honourable, but entering marriage during unusual hardship may introduce burdens that otherwise could have been avoided. Paul does not condemn the person who marries. He recognizes the practical consequences. That is biblical wisdom, not hostility toward marriage. Sometimes the wisest decision is not determined merely by whether something is lawful, but by whether it is expedient under the circumstances.

Verse 27 asks, “Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.” Then verse 28 immediately clarifies, “But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned.” Notice how carefully Paul balances his instruction. He is not telling married Christians to abandon their spouses in pursuit of some supposedly superior spiritual condition. Neither is he forbidding unmarried believers to marry. He is warning against unnecessary changes under the circumstances he is discussing. He adds that those who marry “shall have trouble in the flesh,” and explains, “but I spare you.” That is not a declaration that marriage itself is sinful. It is a recognition that domestic responsibilities bring earthly burdens. A husband does not merely acquire a companion; he assumes obligations. A wife does not merely acquire a title; she enters a relationship demanding faithfulness and sacrifice. The apostle understood that obligations become particularly serious when trouble arrives. Marriage can be a tremendous blessing, but it does not come packaged with a guarantee against suffering.

Verses 29–31 broaden the consideration: “But this I say, brethren, the time is short.” Paul then speaks of believers living without allowing earthly conditions to dominate their entire existence, concluding, “for the fashion of this world passeth away.” These statements must not be twisted into permission for husbands to neglect wives, families to abandon responsibilities, or Christians to disregard ordinary duties. Paul has already defended marital obligations within the same chapter. He is teaching believers to recognize the temporary character of earthly arrangements in light of eternal realities. Whether married or unmarried, rejoicing or sorrowing, buying or possessing, the Christian must remember that this present world is not his final home. The believer awaiting Christ's return ought to hold earthly circumstances in their proper place. A wedding is important, but it is not eternal redemption. A household is valuable, but it is not heaven. The Christian who makes an earthly relationship the center of existence has mistaken a temporary blessing for the permanent purpose of life.

5. Caring for the Things of the Lord Without Distraction

First Corinthians 7:32 contains one of the clearest explanations of Paul's reasoning: “But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong

to the Lord, how he may please the Lord." In this context, Paul is contrasting the obligations associated with marriage and the opportunities that may accompany remaining unmarried. The expression "without carefulness" concerns freedom from certain anxieties and responsibilities, not careless living or freedom from Christian duty. An unmarried believer may possess flexibility in time, location, resources, and daily arrangements that a married believer does not possess. He can sometimes undertake difficult assignments, travel for ministry, adjust his schedule, or make sacrifices without first accounting for the needs of a spouse and children. Those are practical advantages, and Paul plainly recognizes them. The point is not that unmarried people are automatically more spiritual. It is that fewer domestic obligations can provide opportunities for concentrated service. Freedom becomes valuable when it is used for the Lord.

Verse 33 states, "But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." Verse 34 similarly recognizes the married woman's responsibilities toward her husband. Some have used these statements to suggest that married Christians are necessarily worldly or spiritually compromised. That interpretation collapses the moment it is compared with the rest of Scripture. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. First Timothy 5:8 warns against failing to provide for one's household. Caring for a spouse is not automatically sinful worldliness; it is a legitimate responsibility associated with marriage. Paul's contrast concerns divided attention between lawful obligations, not a choice between holiness and wickedness. A married man who neglects his wife in order to appear spiritually devoted has not discovered Paul's secret to superior Christianity. He has neglected responsibilities that God Himself established. The married Christian must serve the Lord faithfully within marriage, while the unmarried Christian may have fewer domestic obligations competing for his time.

Verse 35 provides Paul's stated objective: "And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." There is the purpose of his counsel. He wants believers to benefit spiritually, not become trapped beneath another religious requirement. The phrase "not that I may cast a snare upon you" ought to embarrass anybody who uses this chapter to bind Christians with restrictions Paul never imposed. The apostle is not trying to make life more difficult. He is explaining how certain circumstances may permit more concentrated service. Yet an unmarried believer can waste those advantages just as easily as a married believer can waste his opportunities. A man without a wife can still be distracted by possessions, entertainment, ambition, lust, and laziness. A woman without a husband can still become consumed with worldly concerns. Singleness does not automatically produce devotion. It merely removes certain obligations that might otherwise occupy attention. An

undivided life is not necessarily a dedicated life. It becomes dedicated when the believer actually gives that freedom to Jesus Christ.

6. Marriage Is Not Sin, and Celibacy Is Not a Crown

First Corinthians 7:36–38 deals with questions concerning a virgin and the propriety of marriage. The precise personal arrangement behind the expression “his virgin” has been understood differently, but the controlling statements in the passage are unmistakable. Verse 36 declares, “let them marry,” and concludes, “he sinneth not.” Verse 38 explains that the one who gives her in marriage does well, while the one who does not give her in marriage does better under the considerations Paul has established. Whatever the particular household arrangement being addressed, the passage cannot honestly be turned into a declaration that marriage is wicked. Paul has already explained his preference for remaining unmarried during the present distress, and he continues to recognize marriage as lawful. The difference between doing well and doing better in a particular circumstance does not establish two different classes of salvation. Neither does it mean that every Christian who marries has missed God's best. Wisdom requires attention to the conditions Paul identifies rather than inventing a permanent religious ranking.

The matter becomes even clearer when compared with 1 Timothy 4:1–3. There Paul warns that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Among the errors he identifies is “Forbidding to marry.” That ought to disturb anybody tempted to establish compulsory celibacy as a mark of superior Christianity. God never authorized a religious institution to prohibit marriage universally among its servants. Nor did He authorize anybody to treat unmarried Christians as spiritually second-class citizens. Both errors violate the liberty Scripture recognizes. Marriage is honourable, and singleness can be advantageous. Neither condition saves the soul, and neither automatically produces holiness. A man can remain unmarried for thirty years and still possess a filthy mind, an arrogant spirit, and a useless testimony. Another can remain faithfully married for fifty years while serving Christ with remarkable devotion. The Bible is not impressed by religious costumes, titles, or vows that conceal disobedience. God looks for faithfulness to His Word, not impressive arrangements manufactured to advertise superiority.

There is another matter worth settling. Paul does not teach that a person who remains unmarried must therefore live without affection, companionship, friendship, or ordinary human relationships. Neither does he describe singleness as a license for sexual immorality. The same chapter that honours unmarried service also establishes the lawful place of marriage and the responsibility to avoid fornication. First Thessalonians 4:3 declares, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from

fornication." That commandment applies regardless of marital status. The unmarried believer must maintain purity, while the married believer must maintain fidelity. Both must exercise self-government and resist the flesh. The modern world wants sexual freedom without responsibility, while religious legalism sometimes wants outward restraint without understanding biblical liberty. Scripture rejects both. Holiness does not require everybody to marry, and holiness does not require everybody to remain unmarried. It requires obedience to God. The Christian who confuses marital status with sanctification has mistaken the wrapping paper for the contents.

7. Serve God Where You Stand Instead of Waiting for Another Life

First Corinthians 7:17 declares, "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk." Verse 24 adds, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God." These statements provide a governing principle for the chapter. Paul is not forbidding every change in earthly circumstances; he expressly permits marriage and addresses other legitimate changes. He is correcting the assumption that a Christian must rearrange his entire earthly condition before he can serve God faithfully. A believer should not postpone obedience until some future circumstance becomes available. The unmarried man does not have to wait for a wife before beginning serious Bible study, soul winning, missionary support, or faithful church service. The unmarried woman does not have to wait for a husband before using her abilities for the glory of God. Some Christians have spent years waiting for their lives to begin while the opportunities already placed before them quietly disappeared. The calendar does not stop because somebody has not purchased a wedding ring.

Consider the apostle Paul's own example. First Corinthians 9:5 recognizes that other apostles had the right to be accompanied by a wife, yet Paul did not make marriage a requirement for his ministry. His earthly life became an extraordinary testimony of labour, sacrifice, suffering, and doctrinal faithfulness. Second Corinthians 11:23–28 records imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, dangers, hunger, thirst, and his daily concern for the churches. Those are hardly the experiences of a man sitting around waiting for his real life to begin. Yet Paul never taught that every believer must follow his personal circumstances. Peter served the Lord as a married man, and Paul served Him without a wife. Different earthly responsibilities accompanied their ministries, but both were accountable to the same Saviour. God does not measure spiritual usefulness by counting household members. He measures obedience according to truth. A Christian can be unmarried and useful, married and useful, unmarried and unfaithful, or married and unfaithful. The determining issue is not the domestic arrangement. It is the believer's relationship to the commands and purposes of God.

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” The verse continues by explaining that every believer will receive according to the things done in his body, whether good or bad. This is the Christian's future accountability for service, not the Great White Throne judgment of the unsaved. Salvation is by grace through faith, but the redeemed will answer for the stewardship of their earthly lives. First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that Christian works will be tested, with reward or loss following their evaluation. Nowhere does Scripture suggest that marriage itself guarantees reward or that remaining unmarried guarantees superior recognition. The Lord will judge faithfulness within the responsibilities and opportunities entrusted to each believer. A married Christian must not neglect his family in the name of ministry. An unmarried Christian must not squander his freedom upon selfish pursuits. Both will answer for their service. The important question at the Judgment Seat will not be whether somebody successfully arranged an impressive earthly life, but whether that life was faithfully spent for Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul has spoken plainly, and the Church ought to believe what he wrote. He recognized marriage as lawful, honourable, and appropriate for many believers. He also recognized that remaining unmarried may provide genuine advantages for Christian service, particularly under difficult circumstances. He distinguished commandments from counsel, acknowledged different gifts, and refused to place unnecessary restrictions upon the people of God. Those distinctions should end the foolish debate over whether every Christian must follow the same domestic pattern. Some believers will marry, and they should enter that relationship with biblical seriousness. Others may remain unmarried, whether for a season or throughout their earthly lives, and they should use their opportunities faithfully. Neither condition establishes spiritual superiority. The Lord has not commanded His people to compete over whose circumstances prove the greater devotion. He has commanded them to walk according to His Word. Human opinion may prefer one arrangement over another, but personal preference does not become Scripture merely because somebody delivers it from behind a pulpit.

There is also a warning here for unmarried Christians who have become so occupied with the possibility of future marriage that they have neglected the present responsibilities of Christian living. Wanting marriage is not sin, and Scripture does not condemn the legitimate desire for companionship. But a desire becomes dangerous when it begins governing the conscience, controlling decisions, or demanding compromises that God's Word forbids. A man who neglects his spiritual life while searching desperately for a wife is not preparing himself well for marriage. A woman who abandons biblical convictions

because she fears remaining unmarried has allowed circumstances to overrule obedience. On the other hand, those who prefer remaining unmarried must guard against pride, selfishness, and contempt for marriage. Christian liberty always operates within biblical boundaries. The answer is not to worship singleness or marriage. The answer is to worship the Lord. If God grants marriage, receive it honourably. If He has not provided marriage, do not waste the present life because an imagined future has not arrived.

The final lesson of 1 Corinthians 7 is not that every Christian should remain unmarried, nor that every Christian should eventually marry. It is that the believer belongs to Jesus Christ and must serve Him faithfully within the circumstances permitted by His Word. Paul's counsel was not designed to manufacture misery, impose religious bondage, or create a new class of supposedly superior Christians. His stated desire was that believers might attend upon the Lord without distraction. That is a worthy objective for every Christian, regardless of marital status. The unmarried believer should not be ashamed of a lawful condition that Scripture itself recognizes as potentially advantageous. The married believer should not be ashamed of an honourable institution established by God. Both must remember that earthly circumstances are temporary, while their responsibility to Jesus Christ carries eternal consequences. **The gift is not an excuse for idleness, the wedding ring is not a certificate of holiness, and the absence of a spouse is not evidence of an unfinished Christian life. God did not call you to spend your years proving that your circumstances are better than somebody else's. He called you to be faithful with the life He has given you.**

3 of 10 — Singleness and Service — Alone Does Not Mean Abandoned: Loneliness, Contentment, and the God Who Never Leaves

Key Passage — Hebrews 13:5 (KJV): "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Introduction

There is a considerable difference between coming home to an empty house and coming home to a life abandoned by God, but the devil would be delighted if every unmarried Christian confused the two. A man turns the key in his front door, walks into a quiet house, eats supper alone, and begins wondering whether anybody would notice if he disappeared for a week. A woman watches another friend announce an engagement, congratulates her sincerely, and then goes home wondering whether her own opportunity for marriage has

passed. The house is quiet, the telephone is silent, and the flesh starts preaching a sermon that God never authorized. It says nobody cares, nothing will change, and life would be worth considerably more if somebody were waiting at home. Then Hebrews 13:5 opens its mouth and contradicts the whole miserable performance: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” God did not promise that every Christian would have a spouse sitting across the supper table. He promised something infinitely greater: His own faithfulness. **An empty chair is not evidence of an absent God, and a quiet house does not mean heaven has stopped listening.**

Now before somebody starts dispensing religious slogans like a pharmacist handing out aspirin, understand that loneliness is a genuine experience, and the Bible does not require Christians to pretend otherwise. There are evenings when the companionship of another human being would be a tremendous comfort. There are holidays when an unmarried believer notices that everybody else seems to have somewhere to go. There are moments of sickness when a husband or wife could provide practical help, and there are burdens that become heavier when nobody is physically present to share them. Scripture does not condemn the desire for companionship. Genesis 2:18 records God's declaration concerning Adam: “It is not good that the man should be alone.” That passage establishes the divine provision of marriage in its original setting, although it does not command every Christian to marry. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that human companionship is not some modern weakness invented by people who have failed to develop sufficient independence. God created human beings with capacities for fellowship, affection, and mutual assistance. The Christian should neither worship those desires nor pretend they do not exist.

The real issue is what happens when loneliness begins issuing orders. A legitimate desire for companionship can become a tyrant if the believer allows it to govern his decisions, excuse his sins, or determine his opinion of God. Some people surrender their convictions because they would rather live with the wrong person than live alone. Others withdraw into bitterness, suspecting that every married Christian has received a blessing unfairly withheld from them. Still others attempt to fill the silence with entertainment, endless conversation, inappropriate relationships, or enough digital noise to drown out the testimony of their own conscience. None of those arrangements provides the contentment described in Scripture. Philippians 4:11 records Paul's declaration, “for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Notice that contentment was learned. It was not purchased with a wedding ring, delivered through a romantic relationship, or manufactured by pretending that difficult circumstances were pleasant. It was learned through confidence in the Lord. The believer must understand the difference between

desiring something good and allowing that desire to become more important than obedience to God.

1. I Will Never Leave Thee Means the Lord Is Not Packing His Bags

Hebrews 13:5 begins with a command concerning covetousness: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have.” The verse concerns the believer's manner of life, the temptation to desire what he does not possess, and the sufficiency of God's faithfulness. The promise follows the command: “for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” There is the foundation of biblical contentment. God does not tell His people to be satisfied because every earthly circumstance will become pleasant. He directs them to His abiding presence. The promise echoes assurances God gave His people in earlier Scripture, including His words concerning Joshua, but Hebrews applies the truth to believers facing the responsibilities of Christian living. We must not transfer Israel's national land promises to the Church, but neither should we ignore the assurance the Holy Ghost deliberately places before Christian readers. The Lord's faithfulness is the answer to covetousness. **When God promises not to leave, He is not offering a temporary visit. He is declaring a faithfulness that human circumstances cannot cancel.**

Verse 6 continues, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” Notice what the believer is authorized to say. He can confess the Lord as his helper because God has spoken. That confidence is not grounded in pleasant feelings, favourable circumstances, or the presence of another human being. It rests upon divine testimony. The unmarried Christian may experience loneliness without having been abandoned. He may feel forgotten without actually being forsaken. Feelings can report genuine sorrow, but they cannot overrule the Word of God. A man may feel warm while standing beside a furnace that is about to explode, and he may feel cold while standing safely outside in winter. Neither sensation determines the truth of his condition. Likewise, loneliness describes something a person experiences; it does not establish God's absence. The Christian who allows his feelings to become the final authority has replaced the Bible with an instrument that changes more frequently than the weather.

There is a practical consequence to this doctrine. If God has promised never to forsake His redeemed people, then the unmarried Christian must stop interpreting every disappointment as evidence of divine rejection. A relationship may fail. An opportunity for marriage may never develop. Friends may become occupied with their families, and relatives may live hundreds of miles away. Those circumstances can bring genuine sorrow, but none possesses authority to cancel Hebrews 13:5. The Lord did not promise that believers would never be disappointed by people. He promised His continued faithfulness.

Romans 8:38–39 declares that neither death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, nor any other creature shall separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That is considerably stronger than an assurance that somebody will answer the telephone every evening. Earthly companionship is valuable, but divine faithfulness is foundational. **People can leave your life without removing God from your life. The difference is not small; it is the difference between temporary circumstances and eternal security.**

2. God's Servants Have Known Lonely Roads Before You

Psalm 142 provides a remarkable example of loneliness expressed without disguising the pain. The title places David's prayer in the cave, during a period of danger and distress. Verse 4 declares, “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.” That is not the language of somebody enjoying a pleasant afternoon alone. David felt abandoned by human assistance while facing serious opposition. Yet verse 5 records his response: “I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.” David did not pretend the danger was imaginary. He did not announce that human companionship was unnecessary. He acknowledged the failure of earthly refuge and turned toward the LORD. This is an Old Testament account involving David's historical circumstances, not a direct promise that every present-day believer will escape his difficulties in the same manner. Nevertheless, the spiritual lesson is unmistakable: when human assistance fails, the Lord remains worthy of trust.

Consider also the apostle Paul near the end of his earthly course. In 2 Timothy 4:16 he writes, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.” Here is a man who had spent years preaching the gospel, establishing churches, instructing believers, and suffering for Jesus Christ. Yet when he needed human support during a critical appearance, nobody stood beside him. Imagine that! The great apostle who had helped so many people found himself without the assistance he might reasonably have expected. He could have filled the remainder of his letter with complaints about ungrateful Christians. Instead, verse 17 declares, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.” There is the testimony. Men forsook him, but the Lord strengthened him. Paul was not delivered from every earthly hardship, for his ministry included suffering and his earthly departure was approaching. Nevertheless, divine faithfulness remained certain when human support disappeared.

Second Timothy 4 also reveals something else. Paul did not use the Lord's presence as an excuse to despise ordinary companionship. In verse 9 he writes to Timothy, “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.” Verse 11 declares, “Only Luke is with me,” and Paul

asks Timothy to bring Mark because he is profitable for the ministry. Verse 13 includes a request for his cloke and books, “but especially the parchments.” The man who confidently declared that the Lord stood with him still wanted Timothy to visit. He still valued Luke's companionship and Mark's usefulness. He still needed ordinary provisions. Apparently, genuine spirituality did not require Paul to become a stone statue with no human desires. Some religious advisers would have told him to stop wanting visitors and simply enjoy being alone with God. Paul knew better. He could trust the Lord completely while appreciating the fellowship of faithful brethren. The presence of God does not make Christian friendship unnecessary. It keeps friendship from becoming an idol that must replace God whenever another person is absent.

3. Contentment Is Learned in the School of Circumstances

Philippians 4:11 is frequently quoted by people who have never bothered to read the circumstances surrounding it. Paul writes, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” He is addressing material support and the care the Philippian believers had shown toward him. His contentment did not consist of possessing every comfort or receiving everything he desired. He had experienced real deprivation. Verse 12 declares, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” That is a remarkable testimony. Paul had learned how to remain faithful when circumstances were favourable and when they were difficult. Contentment was not a personality trait that automatically appeared after salvation. It was something learned through God's dealings with him. A Christian who thinks contentment requires pleasant circumstances has misunderstood the lesson before attending the first class.

Then comes Philippians 4:13: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” This verse is not a blank cheque promising that every personal ambition will succeed. It does not guarantee that an unmarried Christian will eventually receive the exact spouse desired, or that enough positive declarations will cause heaven to arrange a wedding. In its immediate context, Paul is explaining the strength Christ supplies for faithfulness through varying circumstances. He could endure need without abandoning the Lord, and he could experience abundance without making possessions his god. That principle speaks directly to the unmarried believer. Christ can strengthen a person to remain pure when temptation presses hard, faithful when companionship is scarce, and thankful when life differs from expectation. The promise concerns strength for obedient living, not divine sponsorship of every personal preference. The Lord did not become our servant when we became His children. We are His servants, and His grace equips us to live faithfully under His authority.

Contentment must also be distinguished from resignation. Resignation says nothing good can happen, nothing can change, and there is no reason to make any effort. Biblical contentment says that whether circumstances change or remain the same, obedience to God will not be suspended. An unmarried Christian may desire marriage, pray about it, seek appropriate fellowship, and pursue a lawful relationship without violating contentment. First Corinthians 7 expressly permits marriage. The problem begins when the desire becomes a demand, and the demand becomes an accusation against God. Some people treat the Lord like a delinquent delivery company because the spouse they ordered has not arrived according to schedule. Scripture offers no guarantee that every believer will marry. It does command believers to trust God and walk uprightly. Contentment does not require a person to declare that an empty house is always pleasant. It requires him to refuse the conclusion that an empty house makes faithful Christian living impossible. **Contentment is not having everything you want; it is refusing to sacrifice what God commands because you have not received what you want.**

4. God Setteth the Solitary in Families

Psalm 68:5–6 declares, “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.” These words reveal God's concern for those who lack ordinary human protection and companionship. The psalm celebrates the LORD's greatness, His care for His people, and His mighty acts in Israel's history. The following verses recall His going forth before His people through the wilderness. We must not tear the statement about the solitary out of that setting and transform it into a personal guarantee that every unmarried Christian will receive a husband or wife. That would be taking a magnificent declaration of divine care and reducing it to a matrimonial prediction. The verse says God setteth the solitary in families. It does not say every solitary individual will marry. God's provision for companionship and community is broader than the establishment of another household through marriage.

The New Testament reveals a wonderful spiritual family belonging to Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:19 declares to Gentile believers, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” In its doctrinal setting, Paul is explaining the position of believing Gentiles in relation to the new man created in Christ, not transferring Israel's national inheritance to the Church. Yet the language is clear. Saved people belong to God's household. First Corinthians 12 presents the Church as one body with many members, each possessing responsibilities toward the others. Romans 12:5 states, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” An unmarried Christian is not spiritually homeless because he

lacks a spouse. He belongs to a body, possesses brethren and sisters in Christ, and has a place within the fellowship of believers. That fellowship should be something more substantial than smiling across the auditorium before everybody rushes home to supper.

Now here is where the local church needs to examine itself. A congregation can maintain a marriage ministry, a couples' retreat, a family banquet, and a calendar filled with household activities while leaving unmarried adults practically invisible. Nobody intends to neglect them, of course. They merely organize everything around couples, assume everybody has a family at home, and then wonder why some members struggle to develop meaningful relationships. Wonderful arrangement! A person can attend faithfully for ten years and still feel like a visitor at a reunion where everybody else shares the same last name. James 1:27 identifies visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction as part of pure religion before God. Romans 12:13 commands believers to be “given to hospitality.” Christian fellowship should include practical concern, invitations, encouragement, assistance, and sincere friendship. The unmarried Christian must also take initiative rather than waiting for others to do everything. But the church ought to understand that being a household of God carries obligations toward those who do not have a household of their own.

5. Christian Fellowship Is More Than Sitting Beside Somebody in Church

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 declares, “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” This wisdom is frequently applied to marriage, and it certainly contains principles relevant to marriage. But the immediate language concerns the advantages of companionship and mutual assistance more broadly. Two labourers can help one another. Two travellers can assist one another. Two friends can provide support during difficulty. The principle is not restricted to husbands and wives. An unmarried believer may need trustworthy Christian friends who can help when sickness arrives, burdens increase, or discouragement becomes difficult to bear. There is nothing weak about recognizing that need. God did not establish the body of Christ so that every member could boast about managing perfectly well without the others. Spiritual independence taken to the extreme becomes practical disobedience.

Proverbs 18:24 declares, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” That first statement deserves attention from those who complain about having no friends while making little effort to cultivate friendship. Fellowship ordinarily requires initiative, kindness, faithfulness, and willingness to bear another person's burdens. Galatians 6:2 commands, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” The unmarried Christian should not merely search

for people who will provide companionship; he should become the kind of faithful friend others can depend upon. Visit somebody who is sick. Encourage a discouraged brother. Help a widow with a practical need. Invite someone to share a meal. Pray for the missionary family instead of merely admiring their photograph. These are not methods for manipulating people into offering attention in return. They are ordinary expressions of Christian love. Friendship is not a vending machine where kindness is deposited and affection is automatically dispensed.

First Corinthians 12:26 declares, “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.” That is how the body of Christ ought to function. When an unmarried Christian experiences a difficult season, his circumstances should not become invisible merely because no spouse is present to communicate his needs. Likewise, the unmarried believer must rejoice sincerely when others receive blessings he still desires. Romans 12:15 commands believers to “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” Both halves matter. A single woman should be able to celebrate her friend's wedding without cultivating envy, and her married friend should be able to recognize that certain occasions may stir genuine sorrow. A single man should not resent a brother's family blessings, and that brother should not assume his unmarried friend has no responsibilities or needs. Christian love is not limited to people whose circumstances resemble our own. The Church becomes healthier when believers stop organizing compassion according to marital categories and start obeying the Scriptures.

6. Loneliness Is a Terrible Excuse for Disobedience

There is a dangerous point at which loneliness stops being a burden a Christian carries and becomes an excuse he uses. A man begins entertaining an ungodly relationship because he is tired of eating supper alone. A woman overlooks serious doctrinal differences because somebody finally seems interested in marriage. Another believer begins an inappropriate emotional attachment to someone else's husband or wife, explaining that the relationship merely provides needed companionship. The flesh can produce a remarkably impressive collection of explanations when it wants something God has forbidden. First Thessalonians 4:3 declares, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” The Lord did not add an exception for lonely evenings, disappointing relationships, or prolonged singleness. Second Corinthians 6:14 warns against being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. That principle does not disappear because a Christian fears remaining unmarried. **Loneliness may explain why temptation feels powerful, but it cannot make disobedience righteous.**

The modern world offers an entire warehouse of counterfeit solutions for loneliness. There are endless entertainment services, social platforms, private conversations, suggestive messages, romantic fantasies, and opportunities to establish relationships without accepting biblical responsibility. A person can spend an entire evening communicating with strangers and finish the night more isolated than when he began. He has collected conversation without cultivating fellowship, attention without commitment, and stimulation without spiritual profit. The Bible commands something better. Philippians 4:8 directs believers toward things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. Second Timothy 2:22 commands, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Notice that fleeing lust is accompanied by pursuing righteousness and fellowship with godly people. The answer is not simply to remove temptation while leaving the whole life spiritually vacant. The Christian must fill his days with what honours God rather than allowing the flesh to select substitutes for obedience.

Self-pity presents another danger. There is a difference between sorrow and the deliberate cultivation of resentment. A Christian may grieve because he lacks companionship, and that grief deserves compassion. But when he begins rehearsing every disappointment, comparing his circumstances with everybody else's, and treating every blessing another person receives as an injury against himself, loneliness has become a breeding ground for bitterness. Hebrews 12:15 warns against a root of bitterness springing up and troubling many. Proverbs 14:30 declares, “A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.” Envy will not make an unmarried Christian more content; it will poison the blessings already available to him. Nor is bitterness cured by discovering that married people have difficulties too. Other people's troubles do not make our own hearts righteous. The proper response is to bring sorrow honestly before the Lord, refuse sinful comparisons, and continue walking in obedience. **A lonely season need not become a bitter life, but bitterness will make even a crowded room feel empty.**

7. When the Longing Remains, Keep Walking with God

There are Christians who have prayed for marriage for years and remain unmarried. Some have watched their friends marry, their younger relatives establish families, and their opportunities for ordinary companionship become fewer with passing time. It would be foolish to tell such people that their desires must be sinful simply because they remain unfulfilled. First Corinthians 7 recognizes marriage as lawful and honourable. Neither should we tell them that God has guaranteed a spouse if they pray with sufficient determination. Scripture makes no such universal promise. Philippians 4:6–7 instructs believers to make their requests known unto God with thanksgiving and promises that the

peace of God shall keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. It does not promise that every request will be granted in the precise form desired. Prayer is not a means of compelling God to follow our timetable. It is the privilege of bringing genuine needs and desires before the Father while remaining subject to His wisdom. Faith does not require a guaranteed outcome before it will obey.

Hebrews 4:15–16 provides another tremendous encouragement: “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” The passage continues by inviting believers to come boldly unto the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Jesus Christ is not an indifferent spectator watching His people struggle from a distance. He entered human experience, endured suffering, faced temptation without sin, and remains the believer's great High Priest. That does not mean He experienced every particular circumstance in precisely the same way every Christian does. It means He is fully qualified to minister mercy and grace to His people. An unmarried believer does not have to disguise loneliness beneath an impressive religious vocabulary when approaching the throne of grace. He can speak honestly to the Lord about sorrow, disappointment, fear, and desire. The answer is not to pretend the burden does not exist, but to carry it to the One who understands human weakness and supplies sufficient grace.

And while waiting, the Christian must live. That sounds simple, but an astonishing number of people have allowed the possibility of future marriage to turn their present lives into holding patterns. They postpone meaningful service, neglect friendships, delay useful responsibilities, and imagine that real life will begin when somebody finally stands beside them at an altar. Ephesians 5:15–16 commands believers to walk circumspectly, “not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Those days are passing whether a Christian marries or remains unmarried. The Lord has given responsibilities for today, not merely possibilities for tomorrow. Study the Bible. Pray. Fellowship with godly people. Help those in need. Support sound preaching. Witness to the lost. Cultivate skills that can be used for God's glory. If marriage becomes available within biblical boundaries, approach it wisely. If it does not, continue serving the Lord. **The Christian who spends his entire life waiting for another life may discover that he wasted the only earthly life God actually gave him.**

Conclusion

Loneliness is real, but it is not sovereign. It can trouble the heart, complicate ordinary circumstances, and make familiar occasions unexpectedly difficult. It cannot cancel the promises of God, change the believer's position in Christ, or give the flesh permission to disobey Scripture. Hebrews 13:5 remains true when a house is full of people and when its

rooms are silent. Philippians 4:11–13 remains true in seasons of abundance and seasons of want. The Lord's provision for fellowship remains important whether a Christian has a spouse or does not. These truths belong together. God has promised His abiding faithfulness, but He has not commanded His people to pretend they possess no human needs. He has established the Church as a body whose members should care for one another, and He has instructed believers to pursue purity, contentment, and good works. A lonely Christian needs the Word of God, prayer, genuine fellowship, and faithful obedience—not a collection of religious slogans that sound impressive until the person offering them goes home to a comfortable family gathering.

There is also a responsibility resting upon married Christians and local churches. Do not treat unmarried believers as forgotten members of the congregation or assume that everybody without a spouse is perfectly content spending every holiday alone. Do not make every invitation a couples' event, every conversation an investigation into someone's romantic prospects, or every unmarried adult a project requiring matrimonial assistance. Show brotherly kindness. Practice hospitality. Offer practical help when needed. Develop genuine friendships that are not dependent upon identical circumstances. At the same time, unmarried Christians must resist the temptation to withdraw, complain, or demand that everyone else organize life around their difficulties. Fellowship requires effort from both directions. The married believer has responsibilities within the household, and the unmarried believer has responsibilities within the body of Christ. Neither possesses the right to neglect the other. **A church that preaches the love of Christ while overlooking lonely people has plenty of doctrine to discuss and some obedience to undertake.** Biblical fellowship is not merely something Christians enjoy. It is something they are commanded to practice.

So when the house becomes quiet, when another wedding invitation arrives, when another holiday passes without the companionship you hoped to possess, do not allow sorrow to become your master. Bring your desires before God without pretending they are unimportant. Refuse the devil's invitation to interpret loneliness as abandonment. Remember David in the cave, Paul standing without human support, and the Lord Jesus Christ who endured suffering without ever committing sin. Remember the promise of Hebrews 13:5 and the strength described in Philippians 4:13. Cultivate Christian friendships, maintain your purity, reject bitterness, and give yourself to the work God has placed before you. Marriage may come, or it may not. Circumstances may change, or they may remain difficult. But the faithfulness of Jesus Christ is not waiting for your circumstances to improve before it becomes sufficient. **You may live alone without being abandoned, desire companionship without making it an idol, and experience sorrow without surrendering your joy in the Lord. An empty house cannot cancel a full**

salvation, an unanswered desire cannot overturn a divine promise, and a missing wedding ring cannot separate a redeemed sinner from the God who has declared, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

4 of 10 — Singleness and Service — Wanting to Be Married Is Not a Sin: Desire, Discernment, and the Danger of Settling

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 7:28 (KJV): "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you."

Introduction

There is something terribly wrong with a religious crowd that can take a blessing God established in Genesis, an institution Christ honoured in the Gospels, and a relationship Paul expressly permitted in the Church Age, and then make an unmarried Christian feel guilty for wanting it. The Bible says, "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned," yet certain religious advisers act as though desiring marriage demonstrates a shortage of spirituality. Apparently, a man can desire to preach, teach, work, purchase a house, or support missionaries without raising eyebrows, but let him desire a godly wife and somebody starts investigating whether he has made an idol out of companionship. A woman can faithfully serve the Lord for years, demonstrate biblical convictions, and maintain a clean testimony, yet the moment she admits that she would like a husband and children, somebody informs her that she needs to become satisfied with Jesus first. Wonderful advice, provided we understand that being satisfied with Christ does not require despising something Christ Himself has declared honourable. Wanting marriage is not a confession of spiritual failure. It is a lawful desire that must be governed by Scripture.

On the other side stands another crowd equally determined to improve upon the Bible. These people cannot understand why an unmarried Christian has not already found somebody, settled down, and produced the appropriate family photograph. They have a timetable for everybody's life, and if you have reached a particular birthday without a wedding ring, they begin making inquiries as though your salvation certificate has expired. A young man is supposedly incomplete until he becomes a husband, and a young woman is treated like an unfinished household project until somebody proposes. Never mind that Paul recommended remaining unmarried under certain circumstances in 1 Corinthians 7. Never mind that the Lord Jesus Christ lived His earthly life without entering marriage. Never mind that Scripture never established a universal wedding deadline. Human tradition has

spoken, and apparently the Holy Ghost is expected to cooperate. Both extremes are wrong. Marriage is neither a requirement for spiritual completeness nor an embarrassment for those who desire it. The Christian must learn to distinguish God's commandments from the expectations of people who have confused their personal preferences with divine revelation.

The danger becomes serious when the desire for marriage begins controlling decisions that ought to be governed by the Word of God. There is nothing sinful about wanting a husband or wife, but there is something terribly dangerous about wanting one badly enough to disregard doctrine, compromise purity, ignore warning signs, or enter an unequal yoke. Loneliness can make a foolish relationship appear attractive. Age can make an ordinary disappointment feel like an emergency. Family pressure can make a person accept somebody he would have rejected immediately if the decision had been made with an open Bible and a clear conscience. Yet God has never commanded a Christian to marry the first available person simply because the calendar is moving. He has never promised every believer a particular spouse, nor guaranteed marriage before a certain birthday. He has commanded His people to walk by faith, maintain holiness, exercise wisdom, and obey His Word. **A legitimate desire becomes a dangerous master when obtaining it matters more than obeying God.** That is the issue we must settle before discussing whom to marry, when to marry, or whether marriage will come at all.

1. God Established Marriage, and He Never Apologized for It

Genesis 2:18 declares, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” Those words were spoken concerning Adam before the fall, when God was establishing the original human household. Adam had received responsibilities from his Creator, but there was no woman corresponding to him. God therefore provided Eve, and Genesis 2:24 established the foundational relationship in which a man leaves father and mother and cleaves unto his wife. This was not an arrangement invented by an ambitious wedding industry or a committee of religious traditionalists. Marriage originated with God. Before sin entered the world, before the first funeral, before the first human argument over household responsibilities, God established the union of man and woman. Anybody who treats the desire for marriage as inherently unspiritual has a rather difficult explanation to offer concerning the second chapter of Genesis. The Creator did not establish a dishonourable institution and then wait for religious people to discover that avoiding it would make them holier.

Nevertheless, the immediate setting must be respected. Genesis 2:18 concerns Adam's particular circumstances at the beginning of human history, when the woman had not yet been created and the human race had not multiplied. It is not a universal declaration that

every unmarried Christian lives in a defective condition. The New Testament plainly recognizes lawful singleness, and the apostle Paul expressly discusses its advantages. We must not turn an historical account into a commandment that contradicts later revelation. But neither should we dismiss the value of companionship that marriage was designed to provide. Adam did not request a philosophical discussion explaining why his desire for companionship revealed emotional weakness. God supplied a suitable helper. Marriage involves companionship, mutual responsibility, physical union, and the establishment of a household. Those blessings are real, although they do not belong to every Christian in identical measure. The believer who desires such companionship is not automatically guilty of discontentment. The question is whether that desire remains submitted to God's revealed will.

Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” Notice that Scripture honours marriage while condemning sexual sin. First Corinthians 7:2 recognizes marriage as God's lawful provision in the face of fornication, and Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. Those passages establish marriage as a serious institution involving obligations before God, not merely an arrangement for romantic entertainment. The Christian may rightly desire a godly marriage because God has declared marriage honourable. Yet honouring marriage does not require everybody to enter it. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7:7 that every man has his proper gift of God, “one after this manner, and another after that.” Different lawful circumstances are recognized within Christian living. The Lord has not issued a command requiring every believer to marry, and He has not issued a command forbidding marriage to believers who might serve Him unmarried. **A blessing does not become a commandment simply because somebody else possesses it, and a desire does not become sinful merely because God has not yet granted it.**

2. A Good Desire Must Never Become a Governing Idol

There is an important distinction between desiring something good and allowing that desire to govern the heart. Proverbs 4:23 declares, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” The passage concerns the necessity of guarding the inner life against corruption, and the principle deserves serious attention when considering marriage. A Christian may desire companionship, children, a household, and the ordinary blessings associated with married life. None of those desires is inherently wicked. But when a particular desire begins determining what the believer will believe, whom he will associate with, and which commandments he will obey, something has gone terribly wrong. The heart has promoted a legitimate blessing into an unlawful authority. Colossians 3:5

identifies covetousness as idolatry. That does not mean every unmarried person desiring marriage is covetous. It means an earthly desire can become spiritually dangerous when it assumes the place belonging to God. The Christian must examine not merely what he desires, but what he is willing to sacrifice in order to obtain it.

Consider the difference between a man who desires a godly wife and a man who believes he cannot live meaningfully until he possesses one. The first may pray, seek wise counsel, cultivate godly friendships, and approach marriage seriously. The second may allow disappointment to consume his life, resent those who marry, and treat every unanswered expectation as evidence that God has dealt unfairly with him. The desire may begin in the same place, but the direction of the heart becomes entirely different. Philippians 4:11 records Paul's testimony: “for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” He did not claim that every circumstance was pleasant or that every earthly desire had disappeared. He learned contentment through dependence upon Christ. An unmarried Christian can desire marriage and remain content in the Lord. Contentment does not mean that you have stopped desiring legitimate blessings. It means that the absence of those blessings has not persuaded you to abandon your responsibilities before God.

The same principle applies to believers who insist they have no interest in marriage. That condition does not automatically demonstrate superior spirituality. A person may remain unmarried because of particular opportunities for service, practical considerations, or a settled desire to devote his attention elsewhere. First Corinthians 7 recognizes such circumstances. Yet another may reject marriage because he refuses responsibility, sacrifices nothing for others, and wants unlimited freedom to satisfy the flesh. The two conditions may look similar from a distance, but their motives are different. Likewise, wanting marriage can arise from honourable intentions or from selfish appetites. A woman may desire a husband with whom she can faithfully serve the Lord, while another wants somebody to furnish financial security without concern for his spiritual condition. A man may desire a godly household, while another merely wants lawful access to pleasures without accepting the weight of husbandly responsibility. **The Lord is not impressed merely because a desire concerns something honourable. He is concerned with whether that desire is governed by obedience.**

3. An Unequal Yoke Is Not Improved by a Wedding Ceremony

Second Corinthians 6:14 delivers a command that modern romantic enthusiasm would dearly love to erase: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” The immediate passage concerns spiritual separation and incompatible

fellowship between believers and unbelievers, not an isolated discussion of courtship. Nevertheless, its governing principle applies directly to the formation of marriage. A Christian should not voluntarily establish the closest earthly partnership with somebody who does not belong to Jesus Christ. Paul reinforces this principle in 1 Corinthians 7:39 when discussing the widow's liberty to remarry, adding the qualification “only in the Lord.” Marriage is not a missionary program designed to convert an unbeliever after the ceremony. A wedding cannot regenerate a lost sinner. The preacher may pronounce the couple husband and wife, but he cannot pronounce the unbelieving spouse born again because somebody exchanged vows. That operation requires the new birth, not a marriage license.

The language of an unequal yoke comes from the picture of animals bound together for common labour. Imagine fastening an ox and a donkey to the same implement and expecting the field to be plowed in a straight line. One animal pulls according to its nature, the other according to its own, and the farmer spends the afternoon wondering why the furrows resemble a road through the wilderness. Now consider the folly of deliberately establishing a marriage in which one person desires to obey Scripture while the other has no spiritual interest in its authority. One wants the household governed by God's Word; the other wants worldly priorities. One desires sound doctrine for the children; the other considers doctrine unnecessary. One understands marriage as a covenant before God; the other regards it chiefly as an arrangement serving personal satisfaction. These differences are not merely questions of favourite foods or preferred furniture. They concern the spiritual direction of an entire household. **Romance may persuade two people to overlook incompatible foundations, but marriage will require them to build upon those foundations every day.**

There is also a difference between marrying somebody who is saved and marrying somebody who merely knows how to use Christian vocabulary. Matthew 7:16 declares, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” In its immediate setting, Christ is warning concerning false prophets, but Scripture elsewhere establishes the importance of observable conduct. James 2 discusses the relationship between professed faith and corresponding works, while Titus 1:16 describes those who profess to know God but deny Him in works. A person who claims salvation while openly despising biblical authority, mocking sound doctrine, pursuing immorality, and displaying no concern for Christian obedience deserves serious examination. Nobody should pretend to possess divine knowledge of another person's heart, but neither is anybody required to ignore obvious conduct. A Christian should not enter marriage because somebody says the right words during a romantic conversation while living in open contradiction to them. The foundation must be examined before the house is built. It is considerably easier to investigate spiritual incompatibility before

marriage than to spend decades living with consequences that could have been recognized beforehand.

4. Discernment Requires More Than Attraction and Religious Conversation

Proverbs 19:14 declares, “House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the LORD.” Proverbs 18:22 adds, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.” These statements honour the value of a suitable wife, but they do not guarantee that every man will marry or that every relationship proposed in religious language has received divine approval. The repeated emphasis upon prudence is worth considering. A prudent wife is not simply a woman with an attractive appearance, pleasant voice, or impressive ability to repeat devotional expressions. Prudence concerns wisdom, sound judgment, and conduct consistent with righteousness. Proverbs 31 describes a virtuous woman through her character, diligence, wisdom, and faithfulness. A Christian man ought to be considerably more interested in those qualities than in whether a woman knows how to produce an attractive photograph. Beauty is not wicked, but it makes a very poor foundation when character has been neglected. A handsome face cannot substitute for a sound mind governed by Scripture.

The same examination applies to men. Ephesians 5:25 commands, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” First Peter 3:7 instructs husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge and give honour unto them. A prospective husband should demonstrate more than the ability to hold a job, compliment a woman, or behave pleasantly during a few carefully arranged meetings. Does he exercise self-government? Does he speak truthfully? Does he accept responsibility for wrongdoing? Does he honour his commitments? Does he demonstrate concern for Scripture and obedience to Christ? Is he willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the good of others? Marriage does not automatically transform an irresponsible man into a faithful husband. Neither does it transform a careless woman into a godly wife. The ceremony reveals the intention to enter marriage; it does not manufacture the character necessary to maintain it. **Do not confuse the ability to make promises with the proven willingness to keep them. The first requires a mouth; the second requires character.**

Biblical discernment also requires observing how a prospective spouse handles disagreement, correction, finances, family relationships, church responsibilities, and ordinary frustration. Proverbs 22:24 warns, “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.” That warning deserves consideration when evaluating someone whose temper repeatedly produces fear, intimidation, or cruelty. Likewise, Proverbs 12:22 declares, “Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.” A person who habitually lies during courtship is not likely to become a

champion of truth merely because wedding photographs have been taken. Practical judgment matters because marriage exposes character under pressure. Attraction may be strong when everybody is rested, financially comfortable, and enjoying a pleasant evening. The real condition of a person's character becomes clearer when plans fail, money becomes tight, illness arrives, or responsibilities demand sacrifice. A Christian should seek counsel from mature believers who know the people involved, while remembering that counsel must agree with Scripture. The purpose is not to find a sinless person, but to avoid wilfully ignoring serious evidence of spiritual incompatibility.

5. Loneliness Does Not Give the Flesh Permission to Negotiate

First Thessalonians 4:3 declares, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” That statement is clear enough to survive every modern attempt to explain it away. God has not established one standard for Christians who marry young and another for Christians who remain unmarried into middle age. The flesh may become impatient, circumstances may become difficult, and the desire for physical companionship may be strong, but the commandment remains unchanged. First Corinthians 6:18 declares, “Flee fornication.” Notice that the instruction is to flee, not to negotiate, experiment, or approach the boundary until somebody becomes sufficiently confident in his self-control. The believer's body belongs to the Lord. First Corinthians 6:19–20 identifies the body as the temple of the Holy Ghost and commands believers to glorify God in body and spirit. A promise of future marriage does not make present fornication acceptable. Two people may sincerely intend to marry, but intentions do not constitute the marriage covenant.

This becomes particularly important in a world that treats sexual restraint as foolishness and personal desire as the highest form of authority. A Christian couple can begin a relationship with apparently honourable intentions and gradually surrender convictions through private situations, inappropriate familiarity, and excuses dressed in sentimental language. Somebody eventually announces that their relationship is different, their circumstances are unusual, and God understands their feelings. Of course God understands the human condition. He also understands the commandment He gave concerning fornication, and He has not misplaced it. Second Timothy 2:22 declares, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” The answer involves both avoiding temptation and actively pursuing godliness. A Christian should establish proper boundaries before passion starts conducting the meeting. It is remarkable how quickly spiritual convictions can become negotiable when the flesh is allowed to appoint itself chairman. Obedience must remain

settled before temptation arrives, not reconsidered every time circumstances become inconvenient.

Sexual compromise is not the only danger. Some unmarried Christians surrender their doctrinal convictions in exchange for attention, companionship, or the possibility of marriage. A man who once insisted upon sound biblical teaching begins attending a congregation that contradicts his convictions because a woman there has shown interest. A woman who once recognized the importance of spiritual agreement begins dismissing serious doctrinal differences because a man treats her kindly. Kindness matters, but kindness does not establish truth. Amos 3:3 asks, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” In its original context the prophet is addressing Israel through a series of pointed questions, yet the illustration rightly reminds us that common direction requires agreement. Not every secondary difference makes marriage impossible, but fundamental disagreement concerning salvation, scriptural authority, holiness, and the Christian life cannot be dismissed as an insignificant inconvenience. **If obtaining a spouse requires abandoning the Bible that taught you how to live, the relationship has already demanded a price no Christian should pay.** Marriage should be entered with a clear conscience, not purchased through spiritual surrender.

6. God Never Promised a Wedding by Your Next Birthday

One of the more troublesome religious inventions surrounding marriage is the claim that God has guaranteed every believer one particular individual who must eventually appear according to a predetermined timetable. People speak confidently about finding “the one,” identifying hidden signs, interpreting coincidences, and waiting for mysterious confirmations. Yet where is the New Testament command instructing Christians to discover a secret spouse whose identity has been concealed somewhere beyond the reach of ordinary biblical wisdom? Scripture teaches that God is sovereign, that believers should pray, and that decisions must be governed by His Word. It does not reveal a universal system by which every Christian receives the name, address, and approximate arrival date of a future husband or wife. Genesis 24 records the remarkable providence surrounding Isaac and Rebekah, but that historical account concerns a particular family within the developing promises to Abraham. It cannot honestly be converted into a guarantee that every unmarried Christian will experience the same circumstances. Narrative is not automatically universal instruction.

Another popular mistake involves using biblical promises as though they were coupons redeemable for a spouse. Psalm 37:4 declares, “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” That statement appears within a psalm concerning trust in the LORD, righteousness, and the conduct of the godly amid

wickedness. It is not a mechanical promise that every earthly wish will become reality if somebody performs enough religious activity. Matthew 6:33 likewise belongs to Christ's kingdom teaching concerning the Father's care and the necessity of seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness. It should not be turned into a Church Age marriage guarantee. Romans 8:28 promises that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose, but the following verses identify that purpose in relation to conformity to Christ. The promise does not mean every Christian gets the relationship he wants. God's goodness must not be judged by whether He follows somebody's romantic timetable.

Prayer remains essential, but prayer is not manipulation. Philippians 4:6–7 commands believers to make their requests known unto God with thanksgiving and promises His peace to keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. A Christian may certainly pray for a suitable spouse, wisdom concerning a relationship, protection from temptation, and discernment when considering marriage. James 1:5 encourages believers lacking wisdom to ask of God. Yet neither passage authorizes the Christian to demand that God provide a spouse before the next birthday. There is a difference between making a request and issuing an ultimatum. Some people have constructed entire systems of expectation upon dates, impressions, dreams, and declarations that Scripture never gave them. When the expected marriage fails to materialize, they become discouraged or accuse God of breaking a promise He never made. **God cannot fail to keep a promise He never gave, and the Christian has no business putting words into His mouth merely because those words would make waiting easier.** Faith rests upon what God has said, not what we wish He had said.

7. Better to Wait with Convictions Than Marry with Regrets

Proverbs 3:5–6 declares, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” The passage teaches dependence upon God rather than confidence in unaided human judgment. It does not promise that every path will lead to marriage, nor does it remove the believer's responsibility to exercise wisdom. Trusting the Lord is not sitting motionless while expecting a prospective spouse to arrive by extraordinary means. Neither is it rushing into the first relationship that appears promising and then announcing that God must have arranged everything because the opportunity existed. Christians are commanded to walk circumspectly, as Ephesians 5:15 states, “not as fools, but as wise.” That requires attention to Scripture, careful observation, prayer, and responsible decisions. A believer who wants marriage may cultivate appropriate friendships, seek opportunities to meet godly people,

and consider suitable relationships without abandoning faith. Patience and initiative are not enemies when both remain governed by biblical principles.

The importance of patience becomes clearer when pressure increases. A person may begin to fear that every year without marriage represents another lost opportunity. Relatives may offer comparisons, friends may arrange introductions, and well-meaning Christians may suggest lowering standards that ought never to be lowered. Here discernment must distinguish biblical convictions from merely personal preferences. A person may have unrealistic expectations concerning appearance, income, background, personality, or lifestyle. Those preferences should be examined honestly. A future spouse does not have to satisfy every imagined detail in order to be suitable. But biblical convictions concerning salvation, moral purity, honesty, spiritual direction, and basic character must not be negotiated away. There is a great difference between adjusting an unnecessary preference and abandoning a scriptural principle. One may demonstrate maturity; the other demonstrates surrender. A Christian should not expect perfection from another sinner saved by grace, but neither should he deliberately marry someone whose established conduct contradicts essential responsibilities of Christian living.

First Corinthians 7:35 provides a valuable governing principle when Paul explains that his counsel is intended for the believer's profit, “not that I may cast a snare upon you,” but so that one may attend upon the Lord without distraction. The apostle was not attempting to trap Christians beneath unnecessary requirements. He wanted them to serve God faithfully according to their lawful circumstances. That principle should guide the unmarried believer who desires marriage. Do not permit the desire to consume years that could be invested in Christian service. Do not neglect your local church, abandon your responsibilities, or imagine that spiritual usefulness must begin after a wedding. If a suitable relationship develops, approach it seriously and honourably. If one does not, continue doing what God has commanded. The Lord has given present responsibilities, not merely future possibilities. **A person who suspends obedience until marriage arrives has allowed an uncertain tomorrow to rob God of a certain today.** Waiting can be a season of faithful preparation, but it becomes wasted time when waiting replaces living.

Conclusion

Wanting marriage is not a sin, and nobody has the authority to make it one. God established marriage in Genesis, Christ honoured it during His earthly ministry, and Paul recognized it as lawful under the instructions given to the Church. The desire for a husband or wife can be honourable, reasonable, and entirely consistent with Christian devotion. But that desire must remain under the authority of Scripture. A man must not compromise his convictions to obtain a wife, and a woman must not abandon obedience to obtain a

husband. Neither should treat marriage as a guaranteed reward for sufficient faith, prayer, service, or patience. God has not promised every believer the same earthly circumstances. He has provided His Word to govern the circumstances in which believers live. Those who marry must enter that relationship with biblical seriousness, while those who remain unmarried must recognize their continuing opportunities and responsibilities before the Lord. The Christian's duty is not to manufacture a particular earthly outcome. It is to obey Jesus Christ.

There is a considerable difference between marrying wisely and marrying desperately. Wisdom examines character, doctrine, conduct, and the responsibilities that marriage will establish. Desperation examines the calendar, listens to pressure, overlooks warnings, and hopes that problems will somehow disappear after the ceremony. They rarely do. A dishonest person does not become truthful merely because vows have been exchanged. An immoral person does not automatically become faithful because a wedding ring has been purchased. An unbeliever does not become regenerated because a Christian spouse desperately wants the marriage to succeed. The time to consider these matters is before entering the covenant, not after discovering that the difficulties were plainly visible all along. Proverbs 14:15 declares, “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.” That is excellent counsel for anybody contemplating marriage. Attraction is not discernment, loneliness is not guidance, and religious conversation is not proof of Christian character. **A wedding can be arranged in a few months, but the consequences of marrying unwisely may endure for decades.**

So let the unmarried Christian desire marriage without shame, pray without demanding, examine relationships without foolishness, and wait without surrendering the present life to disappointment. Let the married Christian stop treating unmarried believers as incomplete people awaiting permission to become useful. Let the local church honour marriage without manufacturing commandments God never gave. Above all, let every believer remember Colossians 2:10: “And ye are complete in him.” A spouse may provide companionship, affection, assistance, and the blessings of an honourable household, but no spouse can supply the spiritual completeness already possessed in Jesus Christ. If God provides a suitable marriage, enter it with gratitude and faithfulness. If marriage has not come, continue serving the Lord with the time and opportunities before you. Do not mistake delay for abandonment, desire for entitlement, or compromise for faith. **Better to remain unmarried with your Bible open, your conscience clear, and your testimony intact than to enter a marriage by closing your eyes to everything God has already told you. A wedding ring is not worth the price of disobedience, and no earthly relationship is worth sacrificing fellowship with Jesus Christ.**

5 of 10 — Singleness and Service — Purity Without a Wedding Ring: The Flesh Does Not Get a Special Exemption

Key Passage — 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 (KJV): "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:"

There is a remarkable little arrangement operating in the modern world where fornication has been promoted from sin to entertainment, lust has been renamed personal freedom, and chastity has become something to apologize for. The world tells unmarried people that sexual restraint is unreasonable, that physical desires must be satisfied, and that God's commandments belong in a museum beside the horse-drawn carriage and the kerosene lamp. Unfortunately, a surprising number of professing Christians have accepted the arrangement without demanding to see a single verse of Scripture authorizing the change. But the Holy Ghost did not leave the matter open for negotiation. First Thessalonians 4:3 declares, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication." There is no misunderstanding the language. God did not say that fornication was acceptable when marriage seemed unlikely, when loneliness became uncomfortable, or when two people claimed to love each other. He said abstain. Apparently, modern society has developed more enlightened opinions than the One who created the human body.

The difficulty is not that Scripture has failed to address sexual conduct. The difficulty is that the flesh has never enjoyed receiving instructions contrary to its appetites. A young man may profess salvation, carry a King James Bible, attend church regularly, and defend sound doctrine with considerable enthusiasm, yet become strangely uncertain about biblical authority when an attractive woman enters the picture. A young woman may insist upon Christian standards until a desirable man begins applying pressure, whereupon convictions that once appeared firmly established suddenly become subjects for discussion. Both sexes are capable of the same foolishness, and neither possesses a special exemption. The Bible does not establish one standard of purity for women and another for men. Neither does it declare that sexual temptation automatically disappears when somebody receives Jesus Christ. The believer still possesses flesh capable of responding to sinful desires. The issue is whether that flesh will be permitted to govern conduct or whether the Christian will obey the Spirit of God.

This subject must be handled with biblical accuracy rather than religious theatrics. Natural attraction is not automatically fornication, and the desire for lawful marriage is not evidence of spiritual corruption. God established marriage before sin entered the world,

and Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” The physical relationship within marriage is not something dirty that God reluctantly tolerates. It belongs within the institution He established. But an honourable appetite does not justify unlawful satisfaction. Hunger is natural, but it does not authorize stealing somebody else's supper. The desire for companionship is legitimate, but it does not authorize entering an immoral relationship. Likewise, sexual desire does not become the final authority over Christian conduct merely because the person experiencing it remains unmarried. **The flesh may have an appetite, but an appetite is not a commandment.** The Christian must learn to distinguish temptation from obedience, liberty from license, and the lawful marriage relationship from fornication dressed in respectable modern clothing.

1. God Has Already Revealed His Will Concerning Purity

First Thessalonians 4:1 begins with Paul's exhortation that believers should walk and please God, “so ye would abound more and more.” Verse 2 reminds them of the commandments delivered “by the Lord Jesus.” Then verse 3 identifies a definite aspect of God's will: “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” Paul is writing to saved people who had received the gospel and were expected to conduct themselves accordingly. He is not explaining how a lost sinner earns justification through sexual restraint. Salvation is by grace through faith, according to Ephesians 2:8–9. Sanctification concerns the believer's separation unto God and his practical conduct in obedience to the Lord. That distinction matters. A person does not become saved by maintaining sexual purity, but a saved person has no permission to practice sexual immorality. Grace does not convert sin into righteousness. It places the redeemed sinner under obligations consistent with the Saviour who purchased him.

Notice the deliberate language in verses 4 and 5: “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God.” Paul contrasts conduct appropriate to God's people with the immoral practices characteristic of those who do not know Him. These Thessalonian believers had been converted from a Gentile environment in which idolatry and immorality were common. First Thessalonians 1:9 records that they had turned “to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Their conversion involved a new spiritual allegiance, and their conduct was expected to reflect that change. The believer's body is not an independent kingdom where the flesh establishes its own laws. It must be governed in sanctification and honour. The world may proclaim that self-control is repression, but the Bible calls it obedience. Apparently, the modern definition of freedom is the right to become a servant of whichever appetite shouts the loudest.

Verse 6 adds another solemn consideration: “That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.” Sexual sin does not exist in a private little compartment where nobody else is affected. It may involve deception, betrayal, exploitation, injury to another household, or the violation of responsibilities owed to others. Paul then declares in verse 7, “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.” Verse 8 warns that the one despising this instruction despises God, “who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.” Those are serious words. The issue is not whether an unmarried Christian finds the commandments convenient. The issue is whether he will submit to the God who gave them. To reject biblical purity knowingly is not merely to disagree with an old-fashioned preacher. It is to disregard divine authority. **You cannot claim to honour the Holy Ghost while deliberately making room for the uncleanness His Word condemns.**

2. Your Body Belongs to Christ, Not to Your Appetites

First Corinthians 6 provides one of the strongest doctrinal explanations of why sexual immorality is incompatible with Christian living. In verse 12 Paul declares, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient,” and adds, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” The apostle immediately discusses bodily appetites and the proper purpose of the body. Verse 13 concludes, “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.” That statement should settle the argument before the flesh begins presenting its excuses. The Christian's body was not created to be governed by uncontrolled lust. Nor did salvation make bodily conduct irrelevant. Paul refuses the notion that physical appetite automatically authorizes physical indulgence. The flesh may demand satisfaction, but the redeemed person is not obligated to obey every demand. A man who claims complete freedom while being unable to resist his own appetites has misunderstood the meaning of liberty. He has merely exchanged one set of chains for another.

The doctrinal argument becomes even more forceful in verses 15–18. Paul asks, “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?” He then warns against joining what belongs to Christ to a harlot. The passage reaches back to the one-flesh principle established in Genesis 2:24, demonstrating that sexual union carries significance beyond momentary physical pleasure. Verse 18 commands, “Flee fornication,” and explains that the person committing fornication sins against his own body. Paul is not merely advising Christians to avoid embarrassment or unwanted consequences. He is confronting conduct utterly inconsistent with their spiritual identification with Jesus Christ. The saved person belongs to the Saviour, and the body must be used accordingly. This does not mean that a believer loses eternal life whenever he commits sin. His salvation rests upon Christ's

finished work. But eternal security must never be twisted into permission to dishonour the Lord. **A salvation that cannot be lost is not a license to live as though the Saviour never purchased you.**

Then comes the tremendous declaration in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” There is the governing principle for sexual purity. The Christian does not own himself absolutely. He has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost dwells within him, and his body belongs to God. That truth applies before marriage, during marriage, and throughout every season of Christian life. A wedding ring does not make the body holy, and the absence of a wedding ring does not remove God's claim upon it. The modern slogan says, “My body, my choice,” as though the Christian could dismiss the claims of redemption with a clever phrase. Scripture answers, “ye are not your own.” The believer's body is not a hotel room where the flesh may entertain whatever guests it pleases. It is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

3. The Flesh Does Not Retire When Somebody Gets Saved

Galatians 5:16 declares, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.” Notice the command and the accompanying promise. Paul does not tell believers that salvation eliminates every sinful desire. He commands them to walk in the Spirit rather than fulfil the flesh. Verse 17 explains, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other.” There is an ongoing conflict in the believer's earthly life. The Christian possesses a new spiritual relationship to God, but his present mortal body has not yet received its final redemption. Romans 8:23 speaks of believers waiting for “the redemption of our body.” Until that future deliverance, the flesh remains capable of temptation and rebellion. The unmarried Christian must understand this warfare without becoming discouraged or excusing sin. Temptation may continue, but God has not commanded His people to surrender whenever temptation appears.

Galatians 5:19 identifies “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness” among the works of the flesh. These are not harmless expressions of personality or innocent alternatives to biblical morality. They are works belonging to the fallen nature. Paul contrasts them with the fruit of the Spirit in verses 22–23, including temperance. That word ought to receive more attention in a culture devoted to satisfying every impulse. Temperance involves self-government, restraint, and conduct under proper control. A saved man ought not boast that his desires are too powerful to resist. A saved woman ought not excuse immoral conduct by claiming that her circumstances are unusually

difficult. The flesh may be persistent, but persistence does not create authority. Romans 6:12 commands, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.” Sin wants a throne, and the Christian must refuse to give it one. **The flesh will campaign for office every morning, but God never commanded you to vote for it.**

James 1:14–15 explains the progression of temptation: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” This passage distinguishes the experience of temptation from the sinful surrender that follows when unlawful desire is embraced. The Christian must recognize temptation early rather than allowing it to mature into deliberate conduct. Proverbs 6:27 asks, “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” The immediate context warns against adultery, but the principle exposes the folly of deliberately entertaining danger while expecting immunity from consequences. A person who repeatedly places himself in compromising situations should not act surprised when temptation becomes stronger. The answer is not to claim an extraordinary level of self-control while continually feeding the flesh. The answer is to recognize danger, obey Scripture, and remove opportunities for sin before they become occasions for repentance.

4. Pornography: When the Eyes Become Servants of the Flesh

Job 31:1 records a striking declaration: “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?” Job understood that moral responsibility extends beyond outward conduct into the manner in which a person directs his attention. The Lord Jesus Christ likewise addressed lustful looking in Matthew 5:28, declaring that the man who looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. That statement occurs within Christ's teaching concerning righteousness and the law, but its moral warning is entirely consistent with the New Testament's commands concerning purity. Colossians 3:5 instructs believers to mortify sinful practices and desires, including “inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” The Christian cannot defend outward restraint while deliberately cultivating inward corruption. A person may remain technically unmarried and physically untouched while allowing his imagination to become a sewer. The absence of an outward act does not make every inward indulgence righteous.

Modern technology has made immoral material readily available in quantities unimaginable to earlier generations. A device small enough to fit into a pocket can provide access to an enormous catalogue of indecency, and the flesh is only too willing to call the arrangement convenient. Pornography trains the attention upon sexual exploitation and gratification without covenantal responsibility, mutual faithfulness, or regard for the dignity

of others. It encourages the viewer to reduce human beings to objects serving personal appetite. Ephesians 5:11 commands, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” That command does not become obsolete when darkness is displayed through a bright screen. A Christian should not spend the evening consuming filth and then imagine that reading a few verses before bedtime automatically sanctifies the experience. The same eyes used to read the Word of God should not be deliberately employed to feed uncleanness. **A screen does not make sin less sinful; it merely allows a person to entertain it without inviting the neighbours to watch.**

Practical obedience requires more than expressing disgust with pornography during a church service. A believer must examine what he watches, what he searches for, what he saves, and what he deliberately returns to when nobody else is present. Psalm 101:3 declares, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes.” Although this is David's declaration in an Old Testament psalm, the principle harmonizes with the Christian responsibility described in Philippians 4:8 to think upon things that are true, honest, just, pure, and worthy of praise. If a particular application, account, device arrangement, or habit repeatedly provides an avenue for temptation, remove the occasion rather than defending its convenience. Seek accountability from a trustworthy mature believer where needed. Establish ordinary safeguards that make obedience easier and secrecy more difficult. No technical restriction can regenerate the heart, but refusing sensible precautions while repeatedly falling into the same temptation is not evidence of superior faith. It is presumption wearing a religious necktie.

5. Dating Does Not Suspend the Commandment to Flee

Second Timothy 2:22 declares, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Paul does not command Timothy to investigate how near he can approach temptation without technically committing sin. He says flee. The same verse also instructs him to pursue righteousness and maintain fellowship with godly people. That is important because purity involves both separation from sin and dedication to what pleases God. A Christian considering marriage should establish boundaries before entering situations where judgment will be clouded by passion. Private meetings, prolonged physical familiarity, inappropriate conversation, and deliberate isolation can create opportunities for compromise. The Bible does not provide an exhaustive rulebook specifying every permissible expression of affection during courtship, and Christians should not pretend otherwise. But the absence of a detailed catalogue does not cancel the clear commands against fornication, uncleanness, and lust. Wisdom establishes safeguards without manufacturing new doctrines.

One of the most common excuses offered for premarital sexual activity is the claim that the couple intends to marry eventually. Apparently, a future ceremony is supposed to legalize present conduct in advance. That is not how Scripture treats marriage. First Corinthians 7:2 declares, “Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.” The distinction is between the lawful marriage relationship and conduct outside it. A promise to marry is not the same thing as being married. An engagement may express sincere intentions, but it does not create the completed marital relationship. Two people can love one another, anticipate marriage, and still be obligated to remain sexually pure before the wedding. Their intentions do not authorize them to claim privileges belonging to a covenant they have not yet entered. **The wedding planned for tomorrow cannot make fornication committed today into obedience.** If a couple truly honours marriage, they ought to honour the boundaries God established around it.

Emotional manipulation deserves particular warning. Nobody should pressure another person into sexual conduct by claiming that refusal demonstrates insufficient love, lack of trust, or unwillingness to pursue marriage seriously. Such pressure is not an expression of biblical affection; it is selfishness demanding satisfaction at another person's expense. First Corinthians 13:5 declares that charity “seeketh not her own.” Genuine Christian love does not require someone to violate conscience or Scripture as proof of devotion. Neither should a believer cultivate a secret relationship involving inappropriate intimacy with someone already married. The fact that conversations begin with spiritual subjects does not guarantee that they will remain honourable. A relationship can become morally dangerous long before its participants admit what they are doing. Christian discretion is appropriate, but secrecy designed to conceal wrongdoing is another matter entirely. If a relationship depends upon deception, pressure, or the gradual abandonment of convictions, the problem is not that biblical standards are too strict. The problem is that the relationship has begun demanding something God forbids.

6. Men and Women Answer to the Same Holy God

The Bible does not establish one moral standard for unmarried men and another for unmarried women. Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” Notice that the warning is not reserved for one sex. Men who commit fornication are accountable to God, and women who commit fornication are accountable to God. Religious communities sometimes develop the disgraceful habit of treating a woman's sexual sin as a public scandal while dismissing a man's identical conduct as an understandable weakness. Scripture does not authorize that hypocrisy. Romans 2:11 declares, “For there is no respect of persons with God.” Although that statement appears within Paul's discussion of divine judgment, the

principle is unmistakable: God does not excuse wickedness because of somebody's reputation, position, or sex. A preacher's son does not receive a special exemption, and a young woman does not carry responsibility for every immoral decision made by a man. Each person must answer for his own conduct.

First Timothy 5:1–2 instructs Timothy concerning proper relationships within the congregation, including treating younger women "as sisters, with all purity." That is a tremendously practical command for Christian men. A woman in the church is not an object to be pursued carelessly, manipulated emotionally, or treated as an opportunity for secret gratification. She is to be regarded with honour and purity. The corresponding responsibility applies to Christian women in their dealings with men. Romans 12:10 commands brotherly affection and honour among believers. Such conduct excludes deliberate seduction, sexual pressure, and the manipulation of another person's affection for selfish advantage. It also requires recognizing that coercion, exploitation, and assault are wrongs committed against another person; the person subjected to such conduct must not be assigned guilt for the offender's actions. Biblical purity is not maintained by blaming the vulnerable while protecting the influential. The Lord's commandments are not instruments for concealing wickedness behind respectable appearances.

Churches must also distinguish between biblical accountability and unnecessary intrusion into private lives. Galatians 6:1 instructs spiritual believers to restore someone overtaken in a fault "in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." That is not permission for gossip, public humiliation, or self-appointed investigators to examine every friendship between unmarried adults. Where genuine sin exists, it should be addressed according to Scripture. Where no sin has been established, suspicion should not be promoted into an accusation. First Timothy 5:19 warns against receiving accusations against an elder without proper witnesses, illustrating the seriousness Scripture places upon responsible judgment. Christian fellowship should encourage purity without creating an atmosphere in which every unmarried man and woman is presumed guilty. Equally, churches must not excuse obvious misconduct because the offender is popular, financially generous, or connected to leadership. **Holiness without truth becomes hypocrisy, and discipline without righteousness becomes persecution.** The Church must practice biblical standards consistently rather than applying them according to personal preference.

7. Marriage Is Not a Magic Cure, but Christ Supplies Grace for Obedience

First Corinthians 7:9 declares, "But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn." Paul recognizes marriage as God's lawful provision for those whose sexual desires make remaining unmarried particularly difficult. That is a practical and

important instruction. Yet the passage does not teach that marriage instantly eliminates lust, selfishness, temptation, or every sinful habit cultivated during unmarried life. A man who has spent years feeding pornography does not automatically develop a pure mind when somebody places a ring upon his finger. A woman who has practiced emotional manipulation does not instantly become faithful and selfless because a preacher pronounces her married. Marriage creates legitimate responsibilities and provides lawful companionship, but it is not regeneration or sanctification. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives sacrificially, and Hebrews 13:4 continues to condemn adultery after marriage. The need for holiness does not end at the wedding altar. It simply continues within a different set of earthly responsibilities.

There is also hope for the Christian who has already fallen into sexual sin. First Corinthians 6:9–11 identifies various forms of unrighteous conduct, including fornication and adultery, and then declares to the Corinthian believers, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” That is the transforming testimony of salvation. The gospel does not declare that sexual sin is harmless. It declares that sinners can be forgiven and brought into a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. First John 1:9 teaches confession of sin and the Lord's faithfulness to forgive and cleanse. For the saved believer, confession concerns restored fellowship and practical cleansing, not purchasing salvation again through religious effort. Repentance must involve turning from the sinful conduct rather than merely regretting its consequences. Forgiveness does not necessarily remove every earthly consequence, but past failure need not become an excuse for continued disobedience.

Romans 6:13 commands believers not to yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, “but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” Here is the positive direction of Christian holiness. The answer is not merely to spend a lifetime announcing what the flesh must not do. The believer must yield himself to God and walk according to the Spirit. Galatians 5:16 promises that walking in the Spirit prevents the fulfilment of the lust of the flesh. That involves prayer, Scripture, obedience, appropriate fellowship, and the refusal to make provision for temptation. Romans 13:14 declares, “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” The command is practical. Stop preparing opportunities for the very sin you claim to hate. Remove what encourages corruption, cultivate what strengthens obedience, and seek faithful help where needed. **The Christian cannot prevent every temptation from appearing, but he is not required to open the door, offer it a chair, and invite it to stay for supper.**

Conclusion

The biblical standard is unmistakable. God has called His people unto holiness, not uncleanness. First Thessalonians 4:3 commands abstinence from fornication. First Corinthians 6 establishes that the believer's body belongs to Jesus Christ and is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Second Timothy 2:22 commands Christians to flee youthful lusts while pursuing righteousness. Hebrews 13:4 honours marriage and warns against sexual immorality. These passages do not contradict one another, and they do not require assistance from modern philosophy to become intelligible. Sexual desire is not automatically sin, marriage is not dishonourable, and singleness is not a spiritual defect. But the lawful existence of sexual desire cannot justify unlawful conduct. The believer must learn to exercise self-government rather than submit to every demand of the flesh. Whether marriage comes early, late, or never, God's commandments remain binding upon Christian conduct. **The wedding ring changes the lawful relationship in which sexual intimacy belongs; it does not change the holiness of the God who established that relationship.**

The Church must stop apologizing for standards that God has never withdrawn. At the same time, it must stop confusing genuine holiness with religious showmanship, selective condemnation, and public suspicion. Unmarried Christians need sound doctrine, practical instruction, godly fellowship, and examples of purity that extend beyond impressive speeches. They need to understand that temptation is real, that obedience may require sacrifice, and that no amount of loneliness makes fornication righteous. Married Christians must demonstrate the same standards within their households, maintaining faithfulness rather than acting as though marriage provides immunity from moral failure. Parents must teach their children that physical desires belong under God's authority. Pastors must preach the whole counsel of God without excusing sin among influential people or inventing commandments where Scripture gives liberty. Every believer must take personal responsibility for his conduct. Christianity is not improved by making sin respectable, and Christian compassion is not demonstrated by assuring people that obedience is unnecessary. Truth must remain truth, even when the flesh finds it uncomfortable.

So if you are unmarried, do not allow the world to convince you that purity is impossible, unreasonable, or reserved for some earlier generation. Your body belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Your salvation was purchased with His blood, your spirit has been quickened by His power, and the Holy Ghost dwells within you. You may desire marriage without shame, experience temptation without surrender, and remain faithful without pretending that obedience is always easy. Guard your eyes, discipline your thoughts, establish wise boundaries, reject immoral relationships, and refuse the counsel of anybody who asks you

to sacrifice Scripture for temporary pleasure. If you have fallen, confess the sin, turn from it, and walk in obedience rather than allowing failure to become a permanent excuse. The Lord has not promised that every unmarried

6 of 10 — Singleness and Service — The Church Is a Family, Not a Couples' Club: Friendship, Fellowship, and Forgotten Singles

Key Passage — Romans 12:10–13 (KJV): "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality."

There is something mighty peculiar about a local church that can organize a marriage conference, a couples' retreat, a parenting seminar, a family banquet, a father-and-son outing, and a mother-and-daughter luncheon, yet cannot seem to figure out what to do with the unmarried Christians who have been faithfully attending for twenty years. The calendar is full, the announcements are plentiful, the fellowship hall is decorated, and everybody has apparently been assigned a place—provided they arrived with a wedding ring and the appropriate number of children. Meanwhile, the unmarried brother who teaches Sunday school, supports missionaries, and faithfully gives to the Lord's work is treated like a visitor waiting for somebody to introduce him to a suitable woman. The unmarried sister who has spent years serving the congregation receives plenty of appreciation for her labour, but precious little consideration when fellowship is being arranged. Then somebody wonders why certain believers feel overlooked. Well, perhaps a church ought to examine whether its understanding of Christian fellowship came from the New Testament or from the activities calendar of a suburban country club.

The apostle Paul had something considerably different in mind when he described the Church. First Corinthians 12:12 declares, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." Notice the language. One body, many members, and one Christ. Paul did not say one body consisting exclusively of husbands, wives, parents, and children, with a miscellaneous waiting room reserved for everybody else. Verse 13 explains that believers have been baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free. The Church is a spiritual organism created through the work of God, not a social organization assembled according to domestic circumstances. Its members belong to Jesus Christ because they have been saved by grace through faith, not because they have successfully

completed a wedding ceremony. If a congregation treats unmarried believers as secondary participants, it has confused earthly relationships with spiritual membership. The body of Christ is not divided into first-class Christians with families and second-class Christians without them.

Now before somebody starts dismantling the family ministry and selling the nursery furniture, understand that there is nothing wrong with activities designed for married couples, parents, or children. Scripture places tremendous responsibilities upon the home. Husbands must love their wives, wives have biblical responsibilities toward their husbands, and parents must bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Those duties deserve serious teaching and practical assistance. But recognizing the needs of married Christians does not authorize the neglect of unmarried Christians. A congregation should be capable of strengthening marriages without treating singleness as a defect. It should be able to encourage parents without forgetting widows, widowers, younger unmarried adults, and older believers who live alone. The Church must not substitute social convenience for spiritual responsibility. **A local church is supposed to be a household of faith, not a collection of private households that happen to use the same auditorium on Sunday morning.** If Christian fellowship disappears the moment the closing prayer is finished, somebody has misunderstood what it means to belong to one another in Christ.

1. One Body Means Every Member Belongs

First Corinthians 12:18 declares, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” That statement ought to correct a considerable amount of foolishness in local church life. God places believers into the body of Christ according to His own work and purpose, not according to their marital status, income, age, social popularity, or family background. The passage concerns spiritual membership and the diversity of functions within the body, but its implications for Christian fellowship are unmistakable. Every saved person belongs to Christ, and every member possesses responsibilities toward the others. A believer does not become more securely attached to the body because he gets married, nor does he become less valuable because he remains unmarried. A wedding may create another earthly household, but it does not create a higher class of spiritual membership. The Holy Ghost did not establish an organization in which certain members become important only after somebody agrees to share their last name.

Paul develops the illustration through the human body. The foot cannot declare that it does not belong because it is not a hand, and the ear cannot deny its place because it is not an eye. Verse 21 declares, “And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor

again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." That is a remarkable rebuke to spiritual pride. The members differ, but they remain mutually necessary. Apply that principle to a congregation in which unmarried believers faithfully teach, give, pray, visit, encourage, evangelize, and serve. Their contributions are not supplementary decorations added to the real church, supposedly consisting of married families. They are fellow members of the body. Nor should unmarried Christians imagine that they have no need of married believers. The Church is not a collection of competing domestic categories. It is a body whose members need one another. A church that treats certain members as optional has misunderstood the very illustration God provided.

Verse 25 explains the divine purpose: "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another." Notice that expression, "the same care." Paul does not require every member to receive identical treatment regardless of circumstances, but he establishes mutual concern rather than partiality. The married couple with children may need practical assistance unavailable to an unmarried person, while the unmarried person may face difficulties that the married couple seldom considers. Verse 26 continues, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." That is not an invitation to organize compassion according to wedding anniversaries. It is a command to recognize the needs and blessings of fellow believers. **When one member becomes invisible because his circumstances are inconvenient to the majority, the body has not become more organized. It has become less obedient.** God never told the eye to ignore the foot because the foot lived in a different household.

2. Brotherly Love Is More Than a Handshake at the Door

Romans 12:10 commands, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." Paul is writing to believers in Rome, explaining the practical conduct that should characterize those who have received the mercies of God. Earlier in the chapter he calls Christians to present their bodies as living sacrifices, warns against conformity to the world, and describes differing gifts within the body. His instructions concerning affection and honour are therefore not decorative suggestions. They belong to the Christian's reasonable service. Brotherly love requires more than a pleasant smile from the usher and a handshake while somebody looks over your shoulder for the next person entering the building. It involves genuine regard, practical consideration, and willingness to serve one another. Unmarried believers are not strangers merely because their personal circumstances differ from those of married families. They are brethren and sisters in Christ. The Lord did not command Christians to love only those whose family arrangements resemble their own.

Verse 13 continues, “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.” There is a practical command that ought to make some congregations examine the distance between their preaching and their dinner tables. Hospitality is not restricted to entertaining people who can return the invitation with a larger house and a more impressive meal. It involves opening one's life and resources to others in appropriate ways. An unmarried brother may appreciate an occasional invitation to supper with a Christian family. A widowed sister may welcome fellowship after spending most of the week alone. A younger believer who lives far from relatives may benefit tremendously from friendship with older Christians. None of those relationships requires a special program, expensive facilities, or a committee meeting lasting three hours. Sometimes Christian hospitality begins with remembering that somebody else exists after church. **A congregation can spend thousands decorating its fellowship hall while overlooking the fellowship that was supposed to take place inside it.**

Romans 12:15 adds, “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” Both commands deserve attention. An unmarried believer should be able to celebrate the marriage of a friend without cultivating resentment. A married believer should be able to recognize the disappointment of someone who desires marriage without offering careless remarks or manufactured promises. When a widow faces the anniversary of her husband's death, Christian compassion should extend beyond a brief expression of sympathy. When an older unmarried man experiences illness, somebody ought to consider whether he has practical help. When a younger single woman receives a promotion, completes a course of study, or demonstrates faithfulness in ministry, her accomplishments should not be dismissed because they do not involve marriage. Christian love rejoices and sorrows according to the needs of others. It does not insist that everybody's life follow the same pattern before their experiences become worthy of attention. The same Bible that commands brotherly affection also condemns the selfishness that makes fellowship revolve around oneself.

3. Every Friendship Is Not a Marriage Proposal

First Timothy 5:1–2 provides a remarkable standard for relationships within the congregation: “Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.” Paul is instructing Timothy concerning proper conduct toward different members of the assembly. Notice that he describes relationships using the language of family, honour, and purity. Younger men are to be regarded as brethren, and younger women as sisters. He does not suggest that every unmarried man and woman who enjoy a conversation must be preparing for marriage. Unfortunately, some Christians appear incapable of observing a friendly

exchange between two unmarried adults without beginning an investigation. A brother helps a sister carry something to her automobile, and somebody starts choosing wedding decorations. Two unmarried believers enjoy discussing Scripture, and suddenly the congregation has appointed itself a matchmaking committee. Perhaps they were simply having a conversation. The New Testament does permit Christians to speak to one another without acquiring a marriage license.

The phrase “with all purity” establishes an essential boundary. Christian friendship must not become an excuse for fornication, emotional manipulation, inappropriate familiarity, or secret relationships that compromise somebody's testimony. First Thessalonians 4:3 commands believers to abstain from fornication, while Romans 13:14 warns against making provision for the flesh. These instructions apply to unmarried men and women just as surely as they apply to everybody else. Yet biblical purity is not the same thing as treating every interaction between the sexes as inherently suspicious. A Christian man should be capable of speaking respectfully to an unmarried woman without attempting to pursue her romantically. A Christian woman should be capable of maintaining wholesome friendships with men without assuming that every act of kindness carries matrimonial intentions. Prudence is necessary, and circumstances require judgment, especially where one person is married. But needless suspicion can turn ordinary fellowship into an exhausting exercise in avoiding imaginary accusations.

There is also something unkind about treating an unmarried Christian as a perpetual matchmaking assignment. People may mean well when they repeatedly recommend prospective spouses, inquire about romantic prospects, or offer introductions. Occasionally, an appropriate introduction may even prove helpful. But there is a difference between thoughtful assistance and relentless interference. Proverbs 25:17 warns, “Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.” The immediate subject concerns excessive visits, but the principle of respecting reasonable boundaries is plain. A person's private life should not become congregational entertainment. Some believers desire marriage; others do not. Some are recovering from disappointment; others are content with their circumstances. Some have legitimate reasons for not discussing personal matters publicly. **Christian concern stops being helpful when it refuses to respect the person it claims to help.** The local church should cultivate friendships that honour Christ, not turn unmarried members into unfinished assignments for enthusiastic social engineers.

4. The Forgotten Singles Are Not All the Same

One mistake frequently made in church life is treating all unmarried adults as though they belong to one identical category. A twenty-three-year-old believer who has never married

does not necessarily face the same circumstances as a sixty-five-year-old widow. A forty-year-old man caring for elderly parents has responsibilities different from those of a young woman living away from home for the first time. A widower who has lost his wife after forty years of marriage cannot simply be handed the same advice given to somebody who prefers remaining unmarried. Scripture itself recognizes different conditions. First Corinthians 7 addresses the unmarried, widows, virgins, and those already married, distinguishing responsibilities and liberties according to circumstance. A wise congregation ought to demonstrate similar care in understanding its members. It is easier to lump everybody into one category and call the arrangement a singles ministry. It requires considerably more love to recognize individuals, learn their circumstances, and offer appropriate fellowship without making assumptions.

First Timothy 5 provides especially important instruction concerning widows. Verse 3 commands, “Honour widows that are widows indeed.” Paul then explains responsibilities involving children, relatives, personal conduct, and the church's assistance to those genuinely in need. Verse 8 warns that failure to provide for one's household represents a serious denial of Christian responsibility. Verse 16 distinguishes family obligations from the congregation's responsibility toward widows indeed. These verses are not a command to establish an indiscriminate financial arrangement without examining legitimate responsibilities. They are instructions for orderly, righteous care. James 1:27 likewise identifies visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction as part of pure religion before God. The Church must not replace family obligations where Scripture assigns them, but neither may it ignore those who lack adequate support. A widow's needs may include practical assistance, appropriate financial help, transportation, companionship, and the simple dignity of being remembered. The Lord takes such matters seriously.

Older lifelong singles also deserve proper consideration. Some have served God faithfully for decades without ever marrying. Others may have desired marriage but never found a suitable relationship. Still others have responsibilities involving parents, relatives, employment, or ministry that have shaped their circumstances. Their lives should not be treated as extended adolescence merely because they do not have spouses or children. Likewise, younger unmarried adults should not be dismissed as spiritually insignificant until they establish households of their own. First Timothy 4:12 instructs Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Spiritual usefulness does not begin at a particular age or upon entering marriage. The congregation ought to recognize faithfulness wherever it appears. **A Christian who has served the Lord unmarried for forty years has not spent forty years waiting to become an adult. He has spent forty years answering to the same Master as everybody else.**

5. Unmarried Believers Must Not Turn Neglect into Bitterness

Now there is another side to this matter, and the unmarried Christian must hear it just as plainly as everybody else. Being overlooked does not authorize bitterness, resentment, or permanent withdrawal from Christian fellowship. Hebrews 12:15 warns against a root of bitterness springing up and troubling many. A person may have genuine reasons to feel disappointed by the conduct of others, yet still be responsible for his own response. Some unmarried believers begin collecting every careless remark, forgotten invitation, and awkward conversation as evidence that nobody in the congregation appreciates them. Eventually, they become so occupied with perceived injuries that ordinary acts of kindness are dismissed as insufficient. That is a dangerous condition. The flesh can turn legitimate sorrow into a permanent grievance if it is allowed to govern the heart. **A neglected Christian should not become a neglectful Christian merely because somebody else failed to show him proper consideration.** The wrong conduct of others never releases us from our own obligations to obey Scripture.

Galatians 6:2 declares, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Then verse 5 states, “For every man shall bear his own burden.” These verses are not contradictory. In context, Paul teaches mutual restoration and assistance while also emphasizing individual responsibility before God. Christians must help one another, but each remains accountable for his own conduct. Applied to fellowship, this means unmarried believers should receive appropriate consideration without making every other member responsible for providing constant companionship. Friendship requires mutual effort. A person who wants fellowship should seek opportunities to offer it. Invite another believer to supper. Visit somebody who is sick. Encourage a struggling brother. Offer practical help to a family facing difficulty. Participate in appropriate church activities. Develop relationships that extend beyond superficial greetings. Do not expect everyone else to organize fellowship while remaining unwilling to take any initiative yourself. Christian love is not a service purchased from the congregation. It is a responsibility shared among its members.

At the same time, married believers must resist the opposite assumption that unmarried Christians possess unlimited time and should therefore perform every inconvenient task nobody else wants. First Corinthians 7:32–35 recognizes that remaining unmarried may provide advantages for attending upon the Lord without certain domestic distractions. That does not mean every unmarried believer is required to be available whenever the church needs somebody to unlock a building, rearrange furniture, clean a classroom, or fill an empty position. The apostle spoke of service to the Lord, not compulsory availability to every human demand. Unmarried Christians have employment, family obligations,

personal responsibilities, and legitimate needs for rest. Some also care for aging parents or other relatives. Their time deserves proper consideration. The Church ought to encourage faithful service without exploiting availability. Likewise, unmarried members should not use legitimate boundaries as an excuse for habitual idleness. **Christian service is not measured by how many people can impose upon your schedule, but by whether your time is faithfully stewarded before Jesus Christ.**

6. Fellowship Must Extend Beyond the Church Building

Acts 2:42 declares concerning the early believers in Jerusalem, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The historical setting must be recognized. These events occurred in Jerusalem during the earliest days following Pentecost, with Jewish believers at the center of the account and the Church's subsequent revelation and development continuing through Acts. We should not turn every circumstance recorded there into an identical administrative requirement for congregations today. Nevertheless, the passage plainly demonstrates that doctrine, fellowship, prayer, and shared life were important features of those early believers' conduct. Fellowship was not limited to occupying the same room while somebody preached. Their spiritual relationships extended into ordinary life. A church may possess excellent preaching and still fail to practice the brotherly concern demanded by that preaching. Sound doctrine should produce sound conduct, not merely an impressive collection of correctly labelled beliefs.

Hebrews 10:24–25 commands believers to consider one another “to provoke unto love and to good works,” while warning against forsaking the assembling of themselves together. Notice that assembling involves more than attendance for its own sake. Believers are to consider one another, encourage one another, and stir one another toward obedience. A congregation that preaches faithfully but cultivates no meaningful relationships among its members is neglecting an important aspect of New Testament life. That does not require turning the church into an entertainment center or replacing preaching with endless social activities. The Word of God must remain central. But there is nothing unspiritual about an appropriate meal shared among Christians, a visit with an elderly member, or practical help offered to someone who lives alone. The danger arises when entertainment replaces doctrine or when doctrine is preached without corresponding obedience. **The church building is where Christians gather; Christian fellowship is something they are supposed to practice after they leave it.**

Practical wisdom must accompany hospitality. Not every relationship is appropriate in every setting, and believers should exercise discretion concerning privacy, purity, household responsibilities, and the appearance of impropriety. First Thessalonians 5:22

commands, “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” That does not mean Christians must surrender fellowship to every unreasonable suspicion, but it does mean they should avoid circumstances that unnecessarily compromise their testimony. Families can include unmarried members in appropriate gatherings. Older Christians can develop mentoring relationships marked by biblical boundaries. Unmarried believers can cultivate friendships with one another without treating every occasion as a romantic opportunity. Widows and widowers can receive practical help with dignity rather than becoming objects of gossip or pity. Congregations can organize fellowship that includes people across generations and domestic circumstances. None of these things requires abandoning sound doctrine. They require applying it. The purpose is not to manufacture constant social activity, but to demonstrate the love, honour, and practical concern Scripture commands.

7. The Lord Will Judge Faithfulness, Not Social Popularity

John 13:34–35 records the Lord Jesus Christ saying, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” These words were spoken to His disciples during the final evening before His crucifixion. The Lord was preparing them for His departure and teaching them concerning their relationships with one another. The commandment is not restricted to people possessing the same earthly circumstances. Christ's love becomes the standard. His disciples are to demonstrate a mutual concern that identifies them as belonging to Him. A congregation may have impressive facilities, an excellent musical program, a full calendar, and a polished public reputation, yet fail miserably in practical brotherly love. None of those outward accomplishments can substitute for obedience to Christ. The world ought to recognize something different about the Church, not merely discover another social organization with religious decorations.

First John 3:17 asks, “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” The question is pointed because it exposes the difference between professed affection and practical assistance. A church member may speak warmly about Christian love while ignoring an elderly believer who needs help obtaining groceries. Another may praise the importance of fellowship while repeatedly overlooking a widow whose circumstances have become difficult. James 2:15–16 similarly confronts the uselessness of religious words offered without necessary practical help. Scripture does not command Christians to satisfy every desire or provide unlimited financial support. It does command genuine concern for legitimate needs. There is a world of difference between being unable to help and refusing to care. **Christian love that never inconveniences anybody may be little more than a**

pleasant expression waiting to be tested. The Lord expects more than attractive language from His redeemed people.

Second Corinthians 5:10 reminds believers that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” The evaluation of Christian service will not be determined by social popularity, family reputation, or the number of invitations somebody received. The married Christian will answer for his responsibilities before God, and the unmarried Christian will answer for his. First Corinthians 3:11–15 establishes that Christian works will be tested, with reward or loss resulting from that evaluation. Salvation remains by grace through faith, but faithful service carries eternal significance. A believer who quietly helps the forgotten may possess a testimony far more valuable than someone who enjoys public recognition while neglecting practical obedience. The Lord sees the visits nobody applauds, the gifts nobody announces, the prayers nobody hears, and the encouragement offered without expectation of reward. He also sees the pride, selfishness, and partiality that respectable church activity can sometimes conceal. The Judgment Seat of Christ will not operate according to the seating arrangements at the church banquet.

Conclusion

The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, and every saved member belongs to His body. That is the doctrinal foundation upon which Christian fellowship must stand. First Corinthians 12 does not authorize believers to organize spiritual importance according to marriage, family size, age, occupation, or social standing. Romans 12 commands brotherly affection, honour, hospitality, and mutual concern. Galatians 6 calls believers to bear one another's burdens, and First Timothy 5 establishes practical responsibilities toward different members of the congregation. These passages require more than agreement during a Bible study. They demand conduct consistent with the truth being taught. A congregation may rightly strengthen marriages, instruct parents, and encourage families, but it must not treat unmarried believers as incidental participants in somebody else's religious organization. The widow, the widower, the younger single, the older unmarried Christian, and the believer without nearby relatives all deserve the consideration appropriate to members of Christ's body. Their circumstances may differ, but their spiritual membership does not depend upon possessing a spouse.

Unmarried Christians, however, must recognize that belonging to the body brings responsibilities as well as privileges. They must not allow disappointment to become bitterness, loneliness to become selfishness, or social neglect to become an excuse for abandoning fellowship. The Lord calls every believer to serve, love, encourage, and bear burdens according to the opportunities available. Married Christians must likewise remember that their households do not represent the entire Church. Family obligations

deserve faithfulness, but they do not erase responsibility toward the brethren. A husband and wife may be occupied with raising children, providing for their household, and fulfilling legitimate domestic duties, yet still demonstrate genuine concern for those outside their immediate family. The solution is not to establish competition between married and unmarried Christians. It is to recognize that every believer has responsibilities before the same Lord. **A healthy congregation does not demand that everybody live under the same roof; it teaches everybody to care for those who belong to the same Saviour.**

So let the Church open its Bible and examine its fellowship. Let married believers remember those who live alone. Let unmarried believers cultivate friendships rather than waiting for everybody else to take the initiative. Let younger Christians honour older members, and older Christians encourage the younger. Let widows receive proper consideration, widowers be remembered, families practice hospitality, and every believer be treated with the dignity appropriate to someone purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. Above all, let sound doctrine produce sound conduct. The Church was never established as a couples' club, a matrimonial marketplace, or an exclusive association for people whose earthly circumstances appear successful. It is the body of Christ, composed of redeemed sinners called to love one another, serve one another, and glorify their common Lord. **A wedding ring may identify who belongs to your earthly household, but the blood of Jesus Christ identifies who belongs to the household of faith. If a church can find a place for every social activity but cannot find a place in its fellowship for a faithful unmarried believer, the problem is not with the believer who has no spouse. The problem is with a congregation that has forgotten what a family in Christ is supposed to be.**

7 of 10 — Singleness and Service — When Are You Getting Married? Family Pressure, Church Expectations, and Unsolicited Advice

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 7:24 (KJV): “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.”

There is a question that has followed some unmarried Christians around for so many years that they could probably have it engraved on their tombstones: “When are you getting married?” It comes from parents, grandparents, relatives, church members, well-meaning friends, and occasionally somebody who has known you for approximately four minutes. You attend a family reunion, and before you can finish your first plate of food, somebody wants to know why you haven't found a wife. You visit a church fellowship, and a dear sister

who has appointed herself director of matrimonial investigations begins suggesting eligible young ladies. A woman reaches thirty without a husband, and suddenly everybody acts as though she has missed the last train out of the station. Apparently, marriage has become the great examination of Christian adulthood, and everybody without a wedding ring is still waiting to graduate. The remarkable thing is that God Almighty never established such an examination. The Bible gives commandments concerning marriage, purity, family responsibilities, and Christian service, but it never commands every believer to marry before a particular birthday. **A question repeated often enough may become irritating, but repetition does not turn human curiosity into divine authority.**

Now there is nothing inherently wrong with asking somebody whether he hopes to marry. Families naturally take an interest in the future of their children, and Christian friends may sincerely desire to see one another enjoy the blessings of a godly marriage. Parents who have raised their children with biblical convictions may understandably hope to see them establish faithful Christian households. Such desires are not sinful merely because they involve another person's future. The trouble begins when interest becomes interference, encouragement becomes pressure, and advice becomes an unofficial commandment. Some unmarried Christians are treated as though their lives cannot be meaningful until they satisfy the expectations of their relatives. Others find themselves constantly compared with siblings who married earlier, cousins who already have children, or church members whose family arrangements supposedly demonstrate greater maturity. The result is a peculiar form of religious competition in which nobody receives a trophy, but everybody is expected to explain his position. The Lord did not call Christians to organize their lives around somebody else's timetable. He called them to walk according to His Word.

First Corinthians 7 provides the doctrinal answer to much of this confusion. Paul writes in verse 17, “But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.” Verse 24 adds, “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.” These words belong to Paul's inspired instruction to believers concerning marriage, unmarried life, and other earthly conditions. They do not prohibit every change of circumstance, for the same chapter expressly permits marriage. Rather, they establish that Christian faithfulness does not require the believer to rearrange his earthly position before he can obey the Lord. Paul recognizes the advantages of remaining unmarried, the responsibilities of marriage, and the liberty of believers to make lawful decisions. The central issue is walking with God. That principle immediately exposes the foolishness of pressuring every unmarried Christian toward the same domestic destination. The apostle did not say, “Let every man find a spouse before he begins serving Christ.” He said, “therein abide with God.” That is a considerably better foundation for making decisions.

1. God's Calling Is Not Governed by Somebody Else's Calendar

First Corinthians 7:17 deserves careful examination because Paul is dealing with more than marriage alone. He discusses different earthly conditions and reminds believers that their relationship to God does not depend upon changing every circumstance surrounding their conversion. In verses 18–19 he addresses circumcision and uncircumcision, while verses 21–23 concern servants and their responsibilities. Paul is not erasing legitimate distinctions or commanding people to remain permanently trapped in undesirable conditions. Indeed, verse 21 recognizes the possibility of obtaining freedom. His concern is that Christians understand the greater importance of belonging to Jesus Christ. Verse 23 declares, "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." That statement should make any believer cautious about allowing human expectations to govern his conscience. Marriage may be desirable and honourable, but no relative, friend, or church member possesses authority to establish a universal wedding deadline. **The Lord purchased you with His blood, not with somebody else's family expectations.**

Notice also what Paul says in verse 28: "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned." The apostle is explaining lawful marriage while recognizing particular circumstances in which remaining unmarried may be advantageous. This establishes liberty within biblical boundaries. Marriage is not forbidden, but neither is it compulsory. First Corinthians 7:7 recognizes that every man has "his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." Those words should prevent Christians from assuming that every believer must follow an identical earthly course. Yet some families behave as though singleness becomes a violation of God's will after a certain age. They may not say it directly, but their questions, comparisons, and expressions of disappointment communicate the message quite effectively. The trouble is that Paul never supplied them with that doctrine. The Holy Ghost recognizes differences among believers, while human tradition insists upon identical results. When tradition contradicts Scripture, tradition must yield.

The same principle applies to the timing of marriage. Scripture does not establish a universal age at which every Christian must marry. Some may marry young and faithfully fulfil their responsibilities. Others may marry later after gaining maturity, establishing financial stability, or finding a suitable relationship. Still others may never marry. None of those circumstances automatically establishes spiritual failure. Proverbs 16:9 declares, "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps." That proverb teaches dependence upon God's direction rather than confidence in unaided human planning. It does not guarantee that every desire for marriage will eventually be fulfilled. The believer must make lawful decisions while trusting the Lord with circumstances beyond his control.

A Christian should not enter marriage merely because another birthday is approaching. **A calendar can tell you how old you are, but it cannot tell you whom to marry, whether you should marry, or whether the person standing before you is fit for marriage.** Those questions require something more reliable than arithmetic.

2. Honour Thy Father and Mother Does Not Mean Surrender Thy Conscience

Ephesians 6:1–3 declares, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.” The commandment concerning honour is serious, and no Christian should dismiss it simply because parental advice becomes inconvenient. Parents deserve respect, gratitude, and appropriate consideration. Their experience may reveal dangers that younger people overlook. A father who warns his daughter about a dishonest man may be demonstrating love rather than interference. A mother who questions her son's readiness to support a household may be offering practical wisdom. Yet Scripture also distinguishes the responsibilities of children within the household from the decisions of adults establishing households of their own. The phrase “in the Lord” matters. Parental authority is not absolute, and honour does not require obedience to instructions that contradict God's Word. Parents deserve respect, but they do not possess the authority of the Holy Ghost.

Genesis 2:24 declares, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” That statement establishes the formation of a new marital household. Marriage involves a legitimate change in earthly relationships and responsibilities. A man cannot properly establish a household with his wife while allowing his parents to govern every decision as though he were still a child. Likewise, parents must recognize that their adult children eventually bear responsibility for decisions that cannot simply be delegated to the family council. Some parents pressure their unmarried children to marry because they want grandchildren, social approval, or the satisfaction of seeing everybody settled. Others discourage a suitable marriage because they fear losing companionship, financial assistance, or control. Both errors can arise from affection that has become selfish. **A parent may sincerely love an adult child and still be wrong about the decision that child ought to make.** Sincerity does not transform personal preference into divine revelation.

The unmarried Christian must respond to parental pressure without adopting an attitude of contempt. Proverbs 15:1 declares, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” A respectful explanation may be necessary, especially when relatives repeatedly raise questions that have already been answered. There is no sin in saying that marriage is being considered seriously, that no suitable relationship presently exists, or

that personal details are not open for continual discussion. Such statements need not be delivered with anger or accusations. First Peter 3:15 instructs believers to be ready to give an answer "with meekness and fear," a principle particularly suitable when explaining convictions. The Christian should be firm where Scripture is firm and gracious where relationships require patience. Some parents will understand; others may continue expressing disappointment. Their response does not determine whether obedience has occurred. **Honouring your parents means treating them rightly before God, not granting them unlimited authority to arrange the remainder of your adult life.**

3. Wise Counsel Is a Blessing, but Meddling Is Another Matter

Proverbs 11:14 declares, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." Proverbs 15:22 adds, "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established." These passages establish the value of wise counsel, particularly when facing important decisions. Marriage certainly qualifies as an important decision. A Christian considering a spouse ought to welcome sound advice from mature believers who understand Scripture and possess knowledge of the circumstances involved. A godly pastor may identify doctrinal problems. Faithful parents may recognize practical concerns. Experienced married Christians may explain responsibilities that inexperienced people have romanticized. The purpose of counsel is to assist judgment, not replace it. A multitude of counsellors is not beneficial merely because a multitude has assembled. If every counsellor is repeating the same worldly assumptions, the result is simply foolishness with a larger attendance record. The value of advice depends upon its agreement with truth.

First Corinthians 7:35 provides an important safeguard against turning counsel into bondage. Paul writes, "And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." Consider the language. The apostle is offering instruction concerning the practical advantages of unmarried service, yet he expressly rejects the purpose of placing a snare upon believers. How remarkable that some Christians manage to be more restrictive than the apostle himself! Paul recognizes legitimate liberty, while modern advisers sometimes manufacture obligations that Scripture never established. Good counsel explains biblical principles, identifies dangers, considers circumstances, and allows lawful decisions to be made responsibly. Meddling attempts to control the outcome through repeated questioning, emotional pressure, or claims of spiritual authority that the adviser does not possess. A pastor may teach what Scripture commands concerning marriage. He cannot reveal a universal wedding date that God never supplied.

The difference becomes particularly clear when considering unsuitable relationships. Second Corinthians 6:14 commands, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” The immediate context concerns spiritual separation and incompatible fellowship, and the principle bears directly upon entering the intimate partnership of marriage. First Corinthians 7:39 also establishes the widow's liberty to marry, “only in the Lord.” A Christian should welcome counsel warning against an unequal yoke, habitual dishonesty, immorality, cruelty, or contempt for biblical authority. Those are substantive concerns. But advice becomes interference when somebody insists that a believer must marry a particular individual because the families are acquainted, the person is available, or the congregation thinks they would make an attractive couple. **A suitable spouse is not selected by majority vote, and a marriage should not be entered because the church committee has grown impatient.** Biblical counsel must preserve both obedience to God and lawful personal responsibility.

4. The Local Church Is Not a Matrimonial Investigation Bureau

First Thessalonians 4:11 contains an instruction that would eliminate a remarkable amount of unnecessary church trouble if believers actually obeyed it: “And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.” Paul is instructing Christians concerning orderly conduct, brotherly love, and responsible daily living. The phrase “do your own business” deserves attention in an age when everybody seems to have acquired an unofficial appointment to supervise somebody else's personal affairs. A single brother walks into the church building, and three people immediately begin asking whether he has met anybody. A single sister speaks to a visiting man, and somebody begins calculating how soon an engagement might occur. Two unmarried believers sit beside one another during a fellowship meal, and the congregation apparently needs to establish a committee to investigate their intentions. There is a difference between Christian concern and religious curiosity with too much free time. Paul commanded quiet, responsible conduct—not constant supervision of other people's romantic possibilities.

First Peter 4:15 warns, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.” Notice the company in which the busybody appears. Peter is not teaching that meddling carries identical earthly consequences to murder or theft, but he is clearly identifying interference in other people's affairs as improper Christian conduct. First Timothy 5:13 likewise warns concerning certain idle persons becoming “tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.” That passage concerns particular widows and circumstances within the congregation, but the warning against idle gossip is unmistakable. A church member does not become

spiritually useful by collecting private information about unmarried adults and distributing it during fellowship. Nor does somebody demonstrate love by repeatedly discussing another person's relationship status without permission. **Gossip does not become ministry because it occurs in a church kitchen, and curiosity does not become discernment merely because somebody begins the conversation with a prayer request.**

The local church should encourage wholesome friendships without assuming every interaction between unmarried adults is romantic. First Timothy 5:1–2 instructs Timothy to regard younger men as brethren and younger women as sisters, "with all purity." Those words establish a pattern of honourable relationships. Men and women should maintain biblical boundaries, exercise discretion, and avoid inappropriate familiarity. Yet purity does not require treating ordinary friendship as suspicious. A single man may help a woman with a practical need without proposing marriage. A single woman may enjoy discussing Scripture with a man without secretly planning a wedding. Christian fellowship should allow believers to encourage and assist one another without constant speculation. The Church ought to be a place where unmarried adults are recognized as useful members of Christ's body, not merely prospective husbands and wives waiting to be paired. First Corinthians 12:27 declares, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Membership in that body is considerably more important than satisfying the congregation's romantic curiosity.

5. Fear of Man Makes a Terrible Matchmaker

Proverbs 29:25 declares, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe." That proverb applies with particular force when unmarried Christians begin making decisions primarily to satisfy the expectations of others. A woman may accept a relationship she knows is spiritually unsuitable because relatives insist that opportunities for marriage are disappearing. A man may rush toward an engagement because friends continually question his maturity. Somebody else may remain in an unhealthy relationship because ending it would disappoint the people who helped arrange the introduction. In every case, fear of human opinion begins displacing responsible judgment. The trap is not always obvious. Sometimes it comes disguised as encouragement, family loyalty, or concern for the future. But pressure cannot make an unsuitable person suitable. **Marrying to silence your critics is rather like setting your house on fire to stop somebody complaining that it needs painting.** The original complaint may disappear, but the consequences become considerably more serious.

First Corinthians 7:28 explicitly declares that marrying is not sin, but Paul also acknowledges that married people "shall have trouble in the flesh." He is addressing

circumstances involving the present distress, yet his recognition of earthly burdens deserves serious consideration. Marriage introduces responsibilities that cannot be dismissed when enthusiasm fades. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives sacrificially, while First Peter 3:7 instructs husbands to dwell with their wives according to knowledge. Titus 2:4–5 addresses the responsibilities of younger married women. These passages describe a serious institution requiring faithfulness, sacrifice, judgment, and spiritual commitment. Nobody should enter that institution merely to escape uncomfortable conversations at family gatherings. A wedding ceremony may last thirty minutes, but marriage introduces obligations intended to endure throughout earthly life. The person who pressures somebody into marriage will not necessarily be present when the consequences of an unwise decision arrive. Advice is easy to distribute when somebody else must live with the results.

The temptation to compromise becomes especially dangerous when loneliness and pressure begin working together. A Christian may overlook unbelief, doctrinal hostility, uncontrolled anger, habitual deception, sexual immorality, or financial irresponsibility because the alternative appears to be continued singleness. Proverbs 14:15 declares, “The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.” Biblical prudence requires examining character rather than surrendering judgment to desperation. This does not mean demanding perfection from a prospective spouse. Every husband and wife remains a sinner in need of God's grace. But there is a difference between recognizing ordinary human weakness and deliberately ignoring established patterns of wickedness. First Thessalonians 4:3 commands abstinence from fornication, and that commandment is not suspended during courtship. The Christian must refuse relationships requiring disobedience. **Loneliness may make compromise attractive, and pressure may make compromise urgent, but neither can make compromise righteous.** Better an unmarried life with a clear conscience than a marriage purchased by abandoning biblical convictions.

6. Marriage Does Not Automatically Produce Christian Maturity

Some families have developed the curious notion that marriage is the official graduation ceremony of adulthood. Until a man gets married, he is supposedly irresponsible. Until a woman becomes a wife, she is supposedly incomplete. Yet the New Testament measures spiritual maturity by standards considerably more demanding than attendance at a wedding ceremony. First Timothy 4:12 commands Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Notice the qualifications. Paul identifies speech, conduct, love, spiritual devotion, faith, and purity. He does not tell Timothy to find a wife before his example can be taken seriously. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a

man be found faithful." Faithfulness is the standard. An unmarried Christian may demonstrate remarkable responsibility, while a married person may neglect obligations that Scripture plainly commands. The presence of a wedding ring does not establish maturity any more than possessing a Bible establishes knowledge of its contents.

Galatians 5:22–23 identifies the fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance." Those qualities ought to appear in the life of a believer regardless of marital status. A man who cannot govern his temper before marriage should not assume that acquiring a wife will automatically produce meekness. A woman who refuses correction while unmarried should not expect marriage to manufacture humility. A Christian who wastes money, neglects responsibilities, or continually breaks promises needs spiritual correction whether a spouse is present or not. Marriage may expose weaknesses previously concealed by independence, but exposure is not the same thing as transformation. The Lord changes believers through His Word and the work of the Holy Ghost, not through the mere acquisition of a domestic title. **A wedding can change your name, address, and responsibilities in a single afternoon; it cannot change your character without the obedience that character requires.** Spiritual maturity is demonstrated through conduct, not announced by a ceremony.

The same principle should correct comparisons between unmarried Christians and their married siblings. One brother may marry at twenty-two and raise several children. Another may remain unmarried at forty while faithfully serving his church and caring for elderly parents. Their responsibilities differ, but the difference does not establish that one has succeeded while the other has failed. A woman may marry young and become a faithful wife and mother. Her unmarried sister may devote substantial time to missionary work, teaching, practical assistance, or caring for family members. Both may honour the Lord within their lawful circumstances. Romans 14:12 declares, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." In its context, Paul is correcting improper judgment among believers concerning disputed matters of conscience. The principle of individual accountability is unmistakable. God does not evaluate one Christian by requiring him to reproduce every circumstance of another. He judges faithfulness according to His revealed will. Family comparisons may produce competition, but they cannot establish spiritual worth.

7. Answer with Grace, Maintain Your Convictions, and Keep Serving

Colossians 4:6 commands, "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." That is excellent instruction for unmarried Christians who have grown weary of repeated questions. You are not required to answer every personal inquiry with a detailed explanation of your circumstances, but

neither should irritation become an excuse for rude or contemptuous conduct. Sometimes a brief, gracious response is sufficient. You may explain that marriage is honourable, that no suitable relationship presently exists, and that you intend to follow the Lord's Word in whatever decision you make. If somebody continues pressing for private details, appropriate boundaries may be expressed without hostility. Proverbs 17:27 declares, “He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit.” Every intrusive question does not require a sermon, an argument, or a permanent family dispute. Sometimes the wisest response is a short answer followed by a change of subject.

First Corinthians 7:32–35 explains the practical advantages that may accompany unmarried life. Paul recognizes that those without certain domestic responsibilities may possess greater freedom to attend upon the things of the Lord. His stated purpose is not to establish compulsory celibacy, but to encourage believers toward faithful service without unnecessary distraction. An unmarried Christian should therefore resist allowing constant questions about marriage to dominate his spiritual life. There are Scriptures to study, lost people to reach, believers to encourage, missionaries to support, and practical needs to meet. Romans 12:11 commands, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” That instruction applies before marriage, during marriage, and throughout every season of Christian living. A person who spends twenty years waiting for a wedding before becoming useful has misunderstood the purpose of those twenty years. **The Lord did not save you to sit in a spiritual waiting room until somebody hands you a marriage certificate.** Your responsibilities before Christ already exist.

There is also an important warning against developing a superiority complex toward married Christians. Some unmarried believers become so irritated by pressure that they begin treating marriage itself as a burden for spiritually inferior people. That is simply the opposite error wearing different clothes. Hebrews 13:4 declares marriage honourable, and First Corinthians 7 recognizes its lawful place. The unmarried Christian should rejoice when others enter godly marriages, while married Christians should respect those who remain single. Romans 12:10 commands believers to prefer one another in honour, and verse 15 instructs them to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. These commands leave little room for contempt, competition, or resentment. A married person should not assume spiritual superiority, and an unmarried person should not claim greater holiness merely because domestic obligations differ. Both answer to Jesus Christ. The question is not whether your circumstances resemble somebody else's. The question is whether you are faithfully obeying the Lord within the circumstances He has permitted.

Conclusion

The Word of God has not established marriage as a universal requirement for Christian maturity, nor has it forbidden believers to desire and pursue an honourable marriage. Paul recognized different gifts, different circumstances, and different responsibilities among the redeemed. He expressly declared that marrying is not sin, while also explaining the advantages that remaining unmarried may provide for concentrated service. These truths leave no room for religious traditions that pressure everybody toward the same earthly arrangement. Parents should offer biblical counsel without attempting to control every decision. Churches should encourage sound marriages without treating unmarried members as unfinished Christians. Friends should express genuine concern without transforming curiosity into constant interference. The believer must listen respectfully to wise advice, reject counsel contrary to Scripture, and maintain a conscience governed by the Word of God. **Human expectations may be loud, persistent, and confidently expressed, but volume has never been a reliable measure of biblical authority.** A thousand opinions cannot establish one commandment God has not given.

The unmarried Christian also has responsibilities in this matter. He must not allow resentment to replace gratitude, irritation to govern his speech, or disappointment to become an excuse for disobedience. He should honour his parents, respect mature counsel, maintain purity, exercise discernment, and remain faithful in Christian service. If marriage becomes a lawful and suitable opportunity, it should be approached seriously rather than rejected merely to prove independence. If marriage does not come, life must not be surrendered to bitterness or spent endlessly explaining personal circumstances to people who have appointed themselves supervisors of another person's future. Philippians 4:11 records Paul's testimony that he had learned contentment in whatever state he found himself. That contentment did not prohibit lawful change, but it prevented circumstances from becoming the foundation of his spiritual life. The believer must learn the same lesson. Whether married or unmarried, he belongs to Jesus Christ and remains responsible for the time, opportunities, and duties entrusted to him.

So when somebody asks, “When are you getting married?” remember that the question itself possesses no authority over your conscience. Answer graciously where appropriate, receive genuine counsel with humility, and refuse pressure that would lead you contrary to Scripture. Do not marry because relatives have become impatient, because friends have begun comparing accomplishments, or because the church gossip committee needs another wedding to discuss. Do not remain unmarried merely to rebel against expectations either. Walk with God, maintain biblical convictions, and make lawful decisions with wisdom. Colossians 2:10 declares, “And ye are complete in him.” That completeness belongs to the believer because of Jesus Christ, not because of any earthly relationship. One day every Christian will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Lord will

evaluate faithfulness rather than social popularity. **A wedding date may satisfy your relatives, a marriage certificate may satisfy the government, and a family photograph may satisfy the congregation's curiosity. But none of those things can substitute for a life surrendered to Jesus Christ. God never commanded you to live according to everybody else's expectations. He commanded you to walk with Him.**

8 of 10 — Singleness and Service — The Undivided Life: What an Unmarried Christian Can Accomplish for God

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 7:35 (KJV): "And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction."

There is something almost comical about a Christian who possesses a degree of freedom that millions of married believers would gladly borrow for an afternoon, yet spends that freedom doing absolutely nothing of eternal consequence. No spouse requiring attention, no children needing transportation, no household full of competing demands, and no immediate domestic responsibilities consuming every available evening—yet somehow there is never enough time to study the Bible, witness to a sinner, visit somebody who is sick, or help accomplish the work of God. There is plenty of time for entertainment, recreation, personal interests, endless conversations, and examining the latest foolishness being advertised by the world, but apparently the Lord's business must wait until the schedule clears. The apostle Paul had a different understanding of the opportunities accompanying unmarried life. In 1 Corinthians 7:35, he identified the possibility of attending upon the Lord without distraction. He was not recommending singleness as an extended vacation from responsibility. He was recognizing a particular freedom that could be invested in something far greater than personal convenience. **A life without a spouse is not a life without obligations, and freedom from certain responsibilities ought to make room for greater faithfulness in others.**

Now understand that Scripture does not teach that every unmarried Christian has unlimited time, money, energy, or opportunity. Some work exhausting hours to provide for themselves. Others care for elderly parents, support struggling relatives, manage serious responsibilities, or endure physical limitations that substantially restrict their activities. The apostle Paul was not establishing a competition between married and unmarried believers, nor was he suggesting that every person without a wedding ring must become a missionary, preacher, or full-time church worker. First Corinthians 7 recognizes different gifts, different

circumstances, and different obligations. Marriage is honourable, and the responsibilities accompanying it are legitimate. But Paul also understood that certain domestic commitments necessarily divide a person's attention. A husband cannot disregard his wife every time a ministry opportunity appears. A mother cannot abandon her children because somebody needs another volunteer. Those responsibilities are not sinful distractions; they are duties established by God. The unmarried Christian may possess freedom from some of those duties, and that freedom creates opportunities worth considering seriously. The question is not whether everybody has equal circumstances, but whether each believer faithfully uses what God has entrusted to him.

There is a difference between living an undivided life and merely living an unoccupied life. A man can live alone, answer to nobody in his household, and still be more distracted than a father raising six children. A woman can remain unmarried, possess considerable flexibility, and spend decades pursuing things that will amount to absolutely nothing at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The absence of a spouse does not automatically produce devotion to God. It simply removes certain obligations that might otherwise demand attention. The Christian must decide what will occupy the space. Romans 12:11 commands believers to be “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” Ephesians 5:16 commands, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Those instructions apply regardless of marital status. A person may never marry and still accomplish tremendous things for Jesus Christ. Another may never marry and accomplish practically nothing beyond feeding the flesh and paying the bills. **The great question is not how much freedom you possess, but what you are doing with the freedom God has given you.**

1. The Undivided Life Begins with an Undivided Purpose

First Corinthians 7:32 declares, “But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord.” Paul is addressing believers in the Corinthian church concerning marriage, unmarried life, and the practical circumstances affecting Christian service. Earlier in the chapter, he recognized the legitimacy of marriage and expressly declared that marrying is not sin. He also spoke of “the present distress” in verse 26, demonstrating that circumstances influenced his counsel. Therefore, his statements must not be twisted into a universal command requiring Christians to remain unmarried. Nevertheless, the advantage he identifies is unmistakable. An unmarried believer may be free from certain domestic concerns that necessarily occupy the attention of married people. Paul is not teaching freedom from responsibility. He is describing freedom for a particular purpose: attending upon the Lord. The objective is not independence as an achievement in itself, but greater opportunity for obedience.

Verse 33 continues, “But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.” The expression does not mean that a married man is automatically worldly or spiritually inferior. Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives sacrificially, and First Timothy 5:8 warns against neglecting one's household. Those responsibilities are commanded by God. Paul is distinguishing legitimate earthly obligations from the particular flexibility available to unmarried believers. Verse 34 makes a corresponding distinction between the married woman and the unmarried woman. The latter may attend upon the things of the Lord with fewer obligations involving a husband and household. The married woman must faithfully fulfil the responsibilities associated with her marriage. Neither arrangement makes one believer more valuable than another. The Christian who uses this passage to insult marriage has accomplished something impressive: he has managed to turn apostolic counsel about avoiding distraction into another distraction.

Verse 35 supplies the governing explanation: “And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you.” Notice Paul's concern. He is not creating a religious trap, imposing compulsory celibacy, or establishing a superior class of Christians who must never marry. He wants believers to recognize opportunities for faithful service without unnecessary distraction. That distinction should govern the entire discussion. A Christian may remain unmarried for a season and later marry. Another may remain unmarried throughout life. Both may use their opportunities honourably. But freedom without purpose soon becomes an invitation to wastefulness. Colossians 3:23 declares, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” The unmarried believer should therefore examine his ambitions, habits, priorities, and use of time. **The absence of a husband or wife does not make life undivided. Life becomes undivided when Jesus Christ receives the allegiance that worldly distractions have been demanding.**

2. Redeeming the Time Means More Than Filling a Calendar

Ephesians 5:15–17 declares, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” Paul is addressing believers concerning their practical walk in the present dispensation of grace. The surrounding verses command separation from darkness, examination of what pleases the Lord, and conduct consistent with spiritual wisdom. Redeeming the time does not mean maintaining a crowded schedule merely to appear productive. It means recognizing that earthly opportunities are limited and must be used wisely. Every hour spent belongs to a life that cannot be repeated. Yesterday's opportunities cannot be recovered simply because tomorrow's intentions sound impressive. A Christian who continually postpones obedience is spending

something he cannot replace. The Lord has not promised any believer another fifty years, another decade, or even another afternoon. The days are evil, the time is passing, and wisdom demands attention to what matters.

Consider how easily time disappears. A person intends to read his Bible but first checks a message. That message leads to another conversation, which leads to an entertaining article, which leads to a video, which leads to another hour of discovering absolutely nothing worth remembering. Before long, the evening has vanished. The Bible remains unopened, prayer has been neglected, and the flesh congratulates itself for having enjoyed a relaxing evening. There is nothing sinful about every form of recreation, and Scripture does not command Christians to remain continuously occupied without rest. But there is a difference between legitimate refreshment and habitual waste. Proverbs 18:9 declares, “He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.” An unmarried believer may possess flexibility unavailable to someone caring for a household, yet that advantage becomes meaningless when every available hour is surrendered to distraction. **The devil does not have to persuade a Christian to renounce his faith if he can persuade him to spend his entire life doing nothing with it.**

Time should therefore be managed according to actual responsibilities and spiritual opportunities. The unmarried Christian may establish consistent periods for Bible study, prayer, evangelism, and service without negotiating every activity around the needs of a spouse or children. He may have opportunities for extended study, additional ministry involvement, travel, or practical assistance. Yet he must also fulfil employment obligations, maintain his home, care for his health, manage finances, and honour legitimate commitments to relatives. Second Thessalonians 3:10 declares, “if any would not work, neither should he eat,” addressing wilful idleness rather than inability to work. Christian service is no excuse for laziness in ordinary responsibilities. Neither is employment an excuse to neglect every opportunity for spiritual usefulness. The issue is wise stewardship. Establish what must be done, identify what can be done, and refuse to let trivial things continually displace important things. A well-used hour may accomplish more for Christ than an entire week crowded with activity that produces no spiritual fruit.

3. The Unmarried Believer and the Work of Evangelism

Mark 16:15 records the Lord's commission, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The commission was given to the apostles in the setting of Christ's resurrection appearances, and its missionary responsibility is reflected throughout the subsequent spread of the gospel. First Corinthians 15:3–4 identifies the saving message concerning Christ's death for our sins, burial, and resurrection. Every Christian should understand that the lost need the gospel, not merely religious encouragement or a

collection of moral improvements. An unmarried believer may have particular flexibility for participating in evangelistic work. He may visit people, distribute gospel literature, assist with outreach, travel to support missionary efforts, or spend additional time discussing Scripture with those seeking answers. These opportunities do not make him superior to married believers who witness faithfully within their circumstances. They simply illustrate how available time can be invested in eternal matters rather than consumed entirely by personal interests.

Acts 18 introduces Aquila and Priscilla, a married couple associated with Paul's ministry and subsequently involved in instructing Apollos more perfectly concerning the way of God. Their example demonstrates that marriage and Christian service are not enemies. Yet Paul's own ministry also illustrates the extraordinary demands that may accompany gospel labour. In Second Corinthians 11:23–28, he recounts imprisonments, beatings, shipwrecks, dangers, hunger, thirst, and continuing concern for the churches. His unmarried condition during the ministry described in Scripture permitted a course of service involving responsibilities and hardships that would have affected a household considerably. Paul did not demand that every Christian reproduce his circumstances. He recognized that different conditions involved different obligations. The practical lesson is plain: if God has provided freedom for a particular kind of service, do not spend that freedom wishing for somebody else's assignment. **The harvest does not stop waiting for every labourer to get married, and the gospel does not require a wedding certificate before it can be preached.**

Evangelism also requires preparation. Second Timothy 2:15 commands, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” A believer should understand the gospel, distinguish salvation by grace from religious works, and learn to answer sincere questions from Scripture. The unmarried Christian may use his available hours to strengthen that knowledge. He can study the difference between Israel and the Church, understand the doctrinal significance of Christ's finished work, and become familiar with passages concerning justification, redemption, and eternal life. But knowledge must not become an excuse for endless preparation without action. A man can collect hundreds of books, purchase a library of reference materials, and discuss evangelism for twenty years without ever giving the gospel to a single lost sinner. The purpose of learning is not merely to become impressive. It is to become useful. A Christian who knows the message ought to look for reasonable opportunities to proclaim it.

4. Bible Study, Teaching, and Discipleship Are Investments That Multiply

First Peter 4:10 declares, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Peter is writing to believers concerning Christian conduct, suffering, prayer, charity, hospitality, and service. The language of stewardship deserves attention. A gift is not merely something to admire; it carries responsibility toward others. The believer's opportunities, abilities, knowledge, and resources should be used for God's glory. An unmarried Christian may possess time to study the Scriptures carefully and assist others who need instruction. Some may prepare Bible lessons, teach appropriate classes, help younger believers establish sound doctrine, write useful materials, or participate in ministries of practical instruction. These activities must remain within the biblical qualifications and responsibilities governing church teaching and leadership. Singleness itself grants no office or authority. Nevertheless, no Christian should imagine that the absence of marriage eliminates every opportunity to communicate the truth.

Second Timothy 2:2 records Paul's instruction to Timothy: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” Notice the multiplication involved. Timothy was to receive sound teaching and entrust it to faithful men capable of teaching others. The principle demonstrates that Christian instruction should extend beyond one individual. The unmarried believer who has spent years studying Scripture may possess knowledge that could strengthen younger Christians, assist those confused by false teaching, or encourage faithful service. But the instruction must be sound. Titus 2:1 commands, “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” There is little eternal profit in teaching people impressive religious theories while neglecting the actual words of Scripture. A Christian may be unmarried and possess tremendous knowledge, but that knowledge should produce humility and usefulness rather than a reputation for correcting everybody within speaking distance.

Writing and preparing instructional materials can also become valuable forms of Christian service. The apostle Paul's letters themselves demonstrate the importance of written instruction, although his inspired epistles occupy an authority no modern Christian author possesses. A believer today may prepare explanations of Scripture, lessons for new converts, accounts of biblical events, or carefully organized teaching materials that others can use. Such work requires diligence, accuracy, and faithfulness to the text. Second Timothy 4:2 commands the preaching of the Word, while Colossians 3:16 calls believers to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly. Written materials should support that purpose rather than replace the authority of Scripture. An unmarried Christian with additional time may undertake extensive study that would be difficult for someone managing numerous domestic responsibilities. Yet the objective remains service, not personal acclaim. **A book**

nobody reads may flatter its author, but a plain explanation of Scripture that helps one believer stand faithfully can accomplish something worth far more than literary applause.

5. Money, Hospitality, and Practical Helps Belong to Christian Service

Romans 12:13 commands believers to be "Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." Christian service is not restricted to preaching, teaching, or travelling to distant places. Practical generosity is a genuine part of obedience. An unmarried believer may possess fewer household expenses than someone supporting a spouse and several children, although that is certainly not true in every situation. Some unmarried Christians struggle financially or bear substantial responsibilities for relatives. Others possess resources that can be directed toward missionary support, benevolence, the needs of their local church, or assistance to struggling believers. Second Corinthians 9:7 declares, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." Giving should arise from willing stewardship rather than manipulation. The unmarried Christian is not obligated to contribute more merely because somebody assumes he has fewer expenses. The Lord considers faithfulness, not somebody else's estimate of disposable income.

Hospitality also belongs within this discussion. Hebrews 13:2 declares, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Romans 12 emphasizes practical kindness among believers, and First Peter 4:9 commands, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Hospitality need not involve an impressive house, expensive food, or elaborate entertainment. A simple meal, thoughtful invitation, appropriate visit, or practical assistance may become a tremendous encouragement. An unmarried Christian can offer such kindness without first possessing the traditional arrangement of husband, wife, and children. He can help an elderly believer, encourage a missionary family, visit somebody who is ill, or provide appropriate companionship to another Christian who lives alone. Of course, prudence and purity must govern relationships, particularly those involving members of the opposite sex. But Christian discretion is not an excuse for refusing every opportunity to show kindness. **Hospitality is not measured by the size of the dining room but by the willingness to make room for somebody besides yourself.**

Consider also the ministry of helps. First Corinthians 12:28 includes "helps" among the provisions God established in the Church. Not every useful act appears before a congregation or receives public recognition. Somebody must prepare materials, maintain facilities, assist elderly members, organize necessary supplies, provide transportation, and undertake the ordinary tasks that make local church ministry possible. An unmarried

believer may possess flexibility that allows participation in such work, and those opportunities deserve respect. Yet practical service must never become an excuse for avoiding the Word of God. Acts 6 records the apostles' concern that necessary material administration should not displace their responsibilities concerning prayer and the ministry of the Word. The historical circumstances involved the early Jerusalem assembly, but the distinction between different forms of legitimate service remains instructive. There is work involving public teaching, and there is work involving practical assistance. Both can honour Christ when performed according to Scripture. The Lord is not impressed with a title if the person possessing it refuses the duties attached to it.

6. Freedom Must Not Become Laziness—or Slavery to Everybody's Demands

Romans 12:11 declares, “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” There is a threefold emphasis worth examining. The Christian is not to be slothful in his responsibilities, he is to maintain spiritual fervency, and his service is ultimately directed toward the Lord. An unmarried person who spends his freedom pursuing entertainment while neglecting ordinary duties has not discovered a superior form of Christian living. Proverbs 6:6–8 points the sluggard toward the diligence of the ant, which prepares its provision without requiring constant supervision. A man does not become industrious merely because he has nobody waiting at home, and a woman does not become spiritually useful simply because she has no children to care for. Discipline is necessary. The flesh will happily consume every available hour if permitted. **An empty calendar may represent opportunity, but it can also represent a life that has not bothered to answer the call of responsibility.**

Yet there is another error that requires equally firm correction. Some congregations assume unmarried members possess unlimited availability. A married man declines an assignment because of family responsibilities, and everybody understands. An unmarried man declines the same assignment, and suddenly somebody questions his dedication. A married woman must attend to her household, and that is properly recognized. An unmarried woman has employment, aging parents, legitimate personal responsibilities, or a need for rest, and somebody assumes she ought to be available for every church activity. That is not biblical stewardship. It is exploitation wearing religious clothing. First Corinthians 7:35 expressly states that Paul's counsel was not intended to cast a snare upon believers. The objective was service to the Lord without unnecessary distraction, not compulsory service to every committee that needs another volunteer. The unmarried believer should give generously of his time where appropriate, but he must also exercise sound judgment concerning his actual obligations and limitations.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated that genuine service does not require submitting to every human demand. In Mark 1:35, He rose early and departed into a solitary place to pray. When others sought Him, He continued according to His appointed mission rather than allowing every immediate expectation to determine His course. His divine mission was unique, but the account exposes the foolish assumption that availability and obedience are identical. A Christian must distinguish God's commandments from the preferences of others. Rest is not automatically laziness, and declining an additional responsibility is not automatically rebellion. Nor should legitimate rest become an excuse for chronic inactivity. The believer must prayerfully assess employment, family duties, spiritual obligations, physical limitations, and the opportunities actually available. Galatians 6:5 declares, “For every man shall bear his own burden.” Every Christian bears personal responsibility before the Lord. **You are a servant of Jesus Christ, not the property of everybody who happens to discover an opening in your schedule.**

7. The Judgment Seat Will Reveal What We Did with Our Opportunities

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” This judgment concerns believers and their accountability for earthly conduct and service. It must not be confused with the Great White Throne judgment described in Revelation 20, where the final judgment of the lost is revealed. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, not a reward purchased through religious activity. Yet the saved Christian will answer for the stewardship of his redeemed life. First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that Christian works will be tested, with reward or loss resulting according to their character. Marriage does not guarantee reward, and singleness does not guarantee greater recognition. The issue is faithfulness. A married believer may honour Christ tremendously through household responsibilities, while an unmarried believer may accomplish much through opportunities unavailable to someone bearing those duties. Both answer to the same righteous Judge.

Consider the tragedy of wasted opportunity. A Christian may possess decades of relative freedom and invest them almost entirely in possessions, recreation, entertainment, and personal advancement. Those activities are not all inherently sinful, but they become spiritually dangerous when they displace the responsibilities of obedience. First Corinthians 3:13 declares, “Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.” Notice that the examination concerns the character of the work, not merely its amount or public reputation. A person may be remarkably busy and accomplish little of eternal value. Another may quietly serve the Lord through prayer, generosity, instruction,

and practical assistance without receiving public applause. God knows the difference. **The Judgment Seat of Christ will not be impressed by how successfully a Christian filled his calendar if the things filling it were worth nothing when tested by fire.**

First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” There is the governing standard. Faithfulness does not require every Christian to possess identical gifts, resources, circumstances, or opportunities. It requires each believer to obey the Lord with what has actually been entrusted to him. An unmarried Christian should therefore resist both despair over what he lacks and pride concerning the freedom he possesses. He should not imagine himself spiritually superior to married Christians, nor should he consider his life incomplete because no spouse stands beside him. His opportunities are real, his responsibilities are serious, and his service matters to God. The same Lord who sees the sacrifices of faithful parents also sees the sacrifices of unmarried servants. The same Judge who recognizes public ministry also knows quiet acts of obedience. **A life does not become valuable because somebody shares your last name. It becomes a faithful Christian life when what belongs to Jesus Christ is yielded back to Him.**

Conclusion

The apostle Paul did not present singleness as an embarrassing condition requiring an explanation. He recognized its potential advantages and connected them directly with attending upon the Lord without distraction. That instruction deserves serious attention from every unmarried believer. Freedom from certain domestic responsibilities can provide opportunities for evangelism, Bible study, teaching, writing, missionary assistance, hospitality, visitation, financial generosity, and practical service. Yet those opportunities do not automatically produce faithfulness. They must be recognized, cultivated, and placed at the Lord's disposal. A Christian can waste tremendous freedom through selfishness, laziness, and endless pursuit of personal pleasure. Another can use that same freedom to accomplish work whose influence continues long after his earthly life has ended. Neither condition is determined by the presence or absence of a spouse. The deciding issue is stewardship. God has not commanded every Christian to marry, and He has not commanded every Christian to remain unmarried. He has commanded His people to serve Him faithfully.

The local church must also understand that unmarried members are not spiritual spare parts waiting to be attached to a family before becoming useful. They are members of Christ's body, possessing opportunities and responsibilities that deserve recognition. Their service should be encouraged without assuming unlimited availability. Their spiritual development should be cultivated without turning every conversation into an investigation

of their marriage prospects. Married believers should honour the responsibilities of their households, and unmarried believers should recognize the opportunities their circumstances provide. Neither group should despise the other. Romans 12:10 commands brotherly affection and mutual honour, while First Peter 4:10 calls believers to minister their gifts as faithful stewards of God's grace. The Church needs married Christians faithfully serving within their households and unmarried Christians faithfully serving within their opportunities. **A congregation that measures usefulness by marital status has confused an earthly relationship with the heavenly calling shared by every redeemed member of Christ's body.**

So if you are unmarried, stop measuring your usefulness by the wedding you have not experienced or the household you have not established. Open your Bible. Learn the doctrines God has revealed. Witness to the lost. Encourage the brethren. Support faithful missionaries. Help somebody who cannot repay you. Develop your abilities, govern your time, maintain your purity, fulfil your responsibilities, and use your resources for the glory of God. If marriage comes, enter it honourably and accept the responsibilities that accompany it. If marriage never comes, do not imagine that your life has been wasted simply because its earthly arrangements differ from those of other Christians. Ephesians 5:16 still commands you to redeem the time, and Romans 12:11 still commands you to serve the Lord. One day the earthly opportunities will be finished, and every believer will stand before Jesus Christ. **The tragedy will not be that you lived without a wedding ring. The tragedy will be if you lived with an open door of opportunity before you and spent your years doing nothing for the One who purchased you with His blood. A life without a spouse can still be a life overflowing with service, and a life faithfully spent for Jesus Christ is never a wasted life.**

9 of 10 — Singleness and Service — Single Again: Widowhood, Loss, and Faithfulness After Marriage Ends

Key Passage — 1 Corinthians 7:39 (KJV): "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord."

There is something particularly cruel about treating a man who has buried his wife of forty years as though he has simply returned to the same circumstances he occupied before their wedding. The house may be the same, the furniture may be the same, and his name may still appear on the same mailbox, but practically everything about his daily life has

changed. The woman who spent decades sharing meals, making decisions, raising children, enduring troubles, and enjoying ordinary companionship with her husband may suddenly discover that the other side of the bed is empty and the familiar voice she expected to hear has fallen silent. Then along comes some well-meaning religious adviser with a collection of cheerful sayings about enjoying the single life. Wonderful! Perhaps somebody ought to inform him that there is a considerable difference between never having married and burying the person with whom you shared half your earthly life. The Bible recognizes that difference. **Death may end an earthly marriage, but it does not erase the years of faithfulness invested in that marriage, nor does it make the surviving spouse spiritually useless.**

Not everybody who becomes unmarried again has experienced the death of a spouse. Some have endured abandonment, betrayal, marital separation, or divorce. Others have faced circumstances involving cruelty, serious wrongdoing, or the destruction of a household they once expected to preserve. These situations must not be thrown into one religious basket and handled with the same convenient explanation. Widowhood is not divorce. Abandonment is not bereavement. The consequences of another person's sin are not automatically the same as personal guilt, and the legal termination of a marriage does not necessarily settle every doctrinal question concerning remarriage. Scripture addresses these matters with distinctions that should be respected. Unfortunately, some churches have managed to become remarkably efficient at distributing judgments while displaying considerably less interest in understanding the circumstances involved. A widow may be pressured to remarry, a divorced believer may be publicly condemned without a proper hearing, and an abandoned spouse may be treated as though every marital failure must involve equal wrongdoing. The Bible deserves better handling than that, and suffering Christians deserve better treatment from people who claim to believe it.

The apostle Paul addresses widowhood, marriage, and unmarried life directly in 1 Corinthians 7. In verses 8–9 he speaks to the unmarried and widows, recognizing the legitimacy of remaining unmarried while also acknowledging the lawful place of marriage. In verses 39–40 he establishes that death releases a surviving spouse from the earthly marriage bond and permits remarriage, with the qualification that such marriage must be “only in the Lord.” First Timothy 5 gives detailed instructions concerning the care of widows, the responsibilities of relatives, and the proper stewardship of the local church. James 1:27 identifies care for the afflicted fatherless and widows as part of pure religion before God. These are not sentimental suggestions designed to make religious people feel compassionate. They are Scripture. The Christian who becomes single again still belongs to Jesus Christ, still possesses responsibilities before God, and still has a place among the redeemed. **An earthly relationship may end through death, and a household may be**

shattered through human failure, but neither circumstance has the authority to cancel the believer's standing in the Saviour.

1. Death Ends an Earthly Marriage, Not a Christian's Worth

Romans 7:2 declares, “For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.” Paul is using the marriage relationship as an illustration within his explanation of the believer's relationship to the law through the body of Christ. The immediate doctrinal argument concerns the Christian's death to the law and new relationship to the risen Saviour. Nevertheless, the illustration depends upon an established principle concerning the earthly marriage bond: death terminates that bond. First Corinthians 7:39 states the same principle directly in the context of marriage instruction. A wife is bound while her husband lives, but if he dies, she is at liberty to marry again within the Lord's boundaries. Notice what the passage does not say. It does not declare that the surviving spouse has failed, that the marriage was meaningless, or that years of faithfulness have somehow been wasted. Death terminates an earthly obligation; it does not rewrite the history of a faithful life.

The Lord Jesus Christ also addressed the earthly character of marriage in Matthew 22:23–30 when the Sadducees presented their question concerning resurrection and a woman who had been married successively to seven brothers. Their question arose from the levirate marriage arrangement associated with Israel under the law, and Christ's answer exposed their misunderstanding of the resurrection. He declared in verse 30, “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” The passage must remain in its proper historical and doctrinal setting, but it plainly establishes that earthly marriage does not continue in precisely the same arrangement beyond death and resurrection. Marriage is honourable and established by God, yet it belongs to the present earthly order. That does not make its responsibilities insignificant. It means they must be understood within the purpose God assigned them. A husband and wife may faithfully walk together for fifty years, but the marriage covenant was never intended to replace their eternal relationship to God.

This distinction becomes particularly important when a surviving spouse begins questioning his identity after bereavement. A man who has been a husband for most of his adult life may struggle to understand his responsibilities without the wife who shared them. A woman who has spent decades caring for her husband may find herself facing decisions she has never made alone. Those adjustments are real, but they do not determine the believer's standing before God. Colossians 2:10 declares, “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” That completeness belongs to the Christian

through union with Jesus Christ, not through the continued existence of an earthly marriage. The surviving spouse does not become half a Christian when the other half of the household is buried. **The cemetery may contain the body of a beloved husband or wife, but it does not contain the surviving believer's salvation, spiritual identity, or remaining opportunities to serve the Lord.**

2. Grief Is Not Unbelief, and Tears Are Not Rebellion

John 11:35 contains two of the shortest and most powerful words in Scripture: “Jesus wept.” The setting concerns the death of Lazarus, the grief of Mary and Martha, and the Lord's approaching demonstration of His power over death. Christ knew what He was about to accomplish. He had already declared in verse 25, “I am the resurrection, and the life.” Yet He wept. That ought to correct the shallow religious notion that tears automatically demonstrate a lack of faith. The Lord Jesus Christ did not shed those tears because He lacked confidence in the Father's power. He entered fully into the sorrow surrounding death while remaining the sinless Son of God. The Christian who mourns a husband or wife has not necessarily abandoned trust in the Lord. Grief is a response to genuine loss. The Bible does not command the bereaved to manufacture cheerful expressions while their hearts are burdened. It commands them to trust the God who understands sorrow.

First Thessalonians 4:13 declares, “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” Notice the wording. Paul does not say believers must never sorrow. He says they must not sorrow in the same manner as those who possess no hope. The following verses reveal the Christian's blessed expectation concerning those who have died in Christ, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the catching away of living believers to meet the Lord. Verse 18 commands, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” The comfort rests upon the finished work of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection promised to His people. It is not a general guarantee that every deceased spouse is saved merely because the survivor loved that person. Eternal salvation rests upon faith in Christ, not upon marital association. But where both husband and wife belonged to the Saviour, the surviving Christian possesses a genuine resurrection hope that death cannot destroy.

Grief must also be handled without allowing sorrow to become an excuse for abandoning every responsibility. Ecclesiastes 3:4 recognizes “A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” The passage describes the changing circumstances of human life under heaven. Mourning has a legitimate place, but life continues to present duties that must eventually be addressed. A bereaved Christian may require assistance with ordinary matters while adjusting to loss. He should not be shamed for needing that help. Yet he should also resist the temptation to withdraw permanently from the brethren,

neglect prayer, or surrender every opportunity for meaningful activity. Psalm 34:18 declares, “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart.” In its original setting, David is celebrating the LORD's deliverance and care, but the principle of divine compassion is consistent with the comfort revealed throughout Scripture. **Tears do not cancel faith, but faith gives the grieving Christian somewhere to carry those tears.**

3. A Widow or Widower May Remarry Without Disobeying God

First Corinthians 7:8–9 declares, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” Paul recognizes both the advantages of remaining unmarried and the lawful place of marriage. He does not require surviving spouses to remain permanently unmarried as a demonstration of loyalty to someone who has died. Neither does he insist that remarriage is necessary to establish a meaningful future. The passage gives room for different circumstances and capacities. A widow may remain unmarried and devote herself to Christian service. A widower may desire another lawful marriage. Neither condition automatically establishes greater holiness. Paul's counsel must be read alongside his explanation of the present distress and his stated desire that believers attend upon the Lord without unnecessary distraction. The apostle is not conducting a competition between surviving spouses to determine who can remain unmarried the longest.

First Corinthians 7:39 provides the clearest statement concerning remarriage after death: “The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.” There are two essential truths in that sentence. First, the death of the husband releases the wife from the earthly marriage bond. Second, the liberty to remarry remains governed by the Lord's authority. The phrase “only in the Lord” is not decorative language placed at the end of the verse to make it sound religious. It restricts the choice to a marriage consistent with belonging to Jesus Christ. A saved widow should not deliberately enter an unequal yoke with an unbeliever. The same principle applies to the widower considering another wife. Second Corinthians 6:14 warns against being unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Loneliness does not cancel that warning, and bereavement does not grant an exemption from biblical discernment.

Verse 40 continues, “But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.” Paul expresses his judgment concerning the advantages of remaining unmarried, particularly within the considerations developed throughout the chapter. He does not revoke the liberty just established in verse 39. The surviving spouse must therefore avoid two opposite errors. One is entering another marriage merely because loneliness has become uncomfortable. The other is refusing to consider a

suitable marriage because somebody insists that remarriage dishonours the deceased spouse. Scripture establishes no such universal prohibition. First Timothy 5:14 even records Paul's counsel that younger widows marry, bear children, and guide the house within the circumstances addressed there. These passages must be handled according to their settings rather than flattened into contradictory slogans. **A second marriage cannot erase a faithful first marriage, and remaining unmarried does not make the surviving spouse more loyal than someone who lawfully remarries.** Faithfulness is determined by obedience to God's Word, not by satisfying somebody else's expectations.

4. Divorce Is Not Widowhood, and Abandonment Is Not the Same as Death

Now we come to a matter that requires careful biblical handling because careless preaching can do considerable damage. Widowhood and divorce are not interchangeable conditions. Death terminates an earthly marriage bond, as Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 plainly establish. Divorce involves the breakdown or legal dissolution of a marriage while the former spouses remain alive, and Scripture addresses that condition differently. First Corinthians 7:10–11 declares, “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.” Those words must not be ignored merely because modern society regards divorce as an ordinary administrative procedure. God established marriage as a serious covenantal relationship. A marriage license may be issued by civil authority, but the responsibilities of marriage are not determined merely by civil convenience. **What the courthouse permits and what the Scriptures approve are not automatically identical things.**

The Lord Jesus Christ addressed divorce in Matthew 19, where the Pharisees questioned Him concerning putting away a wife. He directed them back to God's original establishment of marriage in Genesis and declared in Matthew 19:6, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Verse 9 contains His teaching concerning fornication and remarriage. The immediate audience and Jewish setting must be recognized, and the passage should not be carelessly detached from its context. Nevertheless, Christ's words demonstrate that divorce is a serious moral matter, not a harmless change in household arrangements. First Corinthians 7 supplies direct apostolic instruction to the Church concerning believing spouses and mixed marriages. Verse 15 addresses an unbelieving spouse who departs, declaring that the brother or sister is “not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” Christians differ over the precise remarriage implications of that expression, and the verse should not be made to say more than it explicitly establishes. The departure of an unbeliever is addressed, but

permission for every subsequent remarriage cannot simply be assumed without examining the whole counsel of Scripture.

There is another distinction that must never be overlooked: a person suffering cruelty, threats, abandonment, or other serious wrongdoing must not be treated as though seeking safety automatically constitutes rebellion against God. First Corinthians 7 establishes the seriousness of marriage, but it does not command someone to remain in immediate danger or conceal criminal conduct. Romans 13 recognizes the legitimate function of civil authority concerning wrongdoing, and Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives sacrificially rather than mistreat them. Every marital circumstance deserves truthful examination, not a mechanical judgment delivered before the facts are known. A church should never protect an abusive offender while pressuring the person harmed to remain silent for the sake of appearances. Nor should it casually approve divorce and remarriage without considering Scripture. Both errors betray the responsibility to handle God's Word faithfully. **Biblical conviction is not demonstrated by ignoring suffering, and Christian compassion is not demonstrated by pretending God's commandments no longer matter.** Truth requires distinguishing the circumstances rather than forcing every broken marriage into the same explanation.

5. The Church Must Care for Widows Instead of Merely Mentioning Them

First Timothy 5:3 declares, “Honour widows that are widows indeed.” That is not an ornamental statement suitable for a bulletin announcement. Paul proceeds to explain practical obligations involving widows, their relatives, and the local church. Verse 4 instructs children or nephews to show piety at home and repay their parents. Verse 8 delivers a severe warning: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” The principle is plain. Family members who possess legitimate responsibilities toward dependent relatives must not abandon those obligations and expect the congregation to carry every burden. Scripture places serious emphasis upon care within the household. A widow who has faithful adult children should not automatically be left to struggle alone while those children spend their resources pursuing personal comfort. **The Bible does not recognize a form of spirituality that can support a missionary across the ocean while deliberately neglecting a dependent mother across the street.**

Paul also distinguishes widows who have family support from those genuinely dependent upon the congregation. First Timothy 5:5 describes a widow indeed as one who is desolate, trusts in God, and continues in supplications and prayers. Verses 9–10 establish qualifications for a particular church-supported arrangement involving widows, including age, marital faithfulness, and a reputation for good works. Verse 16 again emphasizes

family responsibility so that the church may relieve those who are widows indeed. These instructions demonstrate that biblical compassion and responsible stewardship belong together. The church is not commanded to distribute resources indiscriminately without considering circumstances, but neither may it ignore those with genuine needs. The qualification concerning threescore years in verse 9 concerns the arrangement Paul is regulating; it should not be twisted into a prohibition against helping a younger widow facing an immediate emergency. Christian mercy must be governed by truth, not strangled by bureaucratic excuses. The Lord expects His people to distinguish genuine need from irresponsibility while remembering that compassion is itself a commanded responsibility.

James 1:27 declares, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James is addressing the twelve tribes scattered abroad, and his epistle must be understood within that stated setting. Nevertheless, his insistence that genuine religion involves practical care harmonizes with the apostolic instructions concerning Christian conduct. Visiting widows is not merely an opportunity to deliver a cheerful religious phrase and disappear before anybody mentions a practical need. A widow may require transportation, help with household maintenance, assistance understanding financial obligations, or simple companionship during a difficult season. A widower may struggle with tasks previously managed by his wife. Some need material help; others need faithful friends who remember them after the funeral flowers have disappeared. **A congregation that can arrange an impressive funeral but cannot remember the surviving spouse six months later has confused ceremonial kindness with continuing Christian responsibility.** The funeral service may last an hour; the consequences of bereavement can remain for decades.

6. Do Not Let Loneliness Make Decisions That Require Wisdom

Proverbs 14:15 declares, "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going." That principle becomes particularly important after the death of a spouse or the collapse of a marriage. Loneliness can make ordinary attention seem extraordinary. A surviving spouse who has endured months of silence may become deeply attached to someone who offers companionship, expresses sympathy, or promises a more comfortable future. There is nothing inherently sinful about forming a new relationship where Scripture permits it, but grief must not be allowed to replace judgment. A person who appears compassionate during pleasant conversations may reveal very different qualities when responsibilities arise. Does the prospective spouse profess genuine faith in Christ? Is there evidence of sound character, honesty, financial responsibility, and obedience to Scripture? Are there unresolved obligations from previous relationships?

These questions require careful consideration. **A lonely heart can mistake a pleasant conversation for proven character, but marriage will eventually require something more substantial than agreeable words spoken over supper.**

Financial vulnerability also deserves attention. A surviving spouse may suddenly become responsible for bills, insurance, property, debts, taxes, or decisions previously handled by the deceased partner. Some face genuine hardship; others possess assets that make them attractive targets for dishonest people. Proverbs 21:5 declares, “The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.” The proverb warns against careless haste, and its wisdom applies to important financial decisions. A widow should not be pressured to surrender control of property merely because somebody promises companionship. A widower should not assume that affection removes the need for ordinary financial judgment. Important arrangements involving inheritances, property, accounts, and future obligations deserve careful examination and competent assistance where appropriate. There is no spiritual virtue in refusing prudent counsel. The Bible does not teach that trusting God requires abandoning common sense. **Faith does not require a Christian to hand over the keys to the house, the bank account, and his future to the first person who knows how to sound sympathetic.**

The opposite danger is permanent withdrawal. Some people experience such profound loss that they begin avoiding fellowship, refusing invitations, neglecting church attendance, and treating every future relationship as an unwelcome reminder of what has disappeared. Grief deserves compassion, but isolation can become spiritually destructive when it is permitted to govern the remainder of life. Hebrews 10:24–25 commands believers to consider one another and not forsake assembling together. Galatians 6:2 instructs Christians to bear one another's burdens. Those commands remain relevant after bereavement. A surviving spouse may require time, patience, and considerable adjustment, but he still needs the fellowship of the brethren. Appropriate friendships should be cultivated without pressure to pursue romance. The church ought to offer companionship without treating every widowed person as a matchmaking project. Likewise, the grieving believer must recognize that continuing to live does not dishonour the spouse who has died. **Faithfulness to yesterday's memories does not require disobedience to today's responsibilities.** The Lord still has work for His people while He permits them to remain upon the earth.

7. The Lord Still Has Work for Those Who Remain

Luke 2:36–38 introduces Anna, a prophetess who had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity and had continued as a widow into great age. She served God with fastings and prayers, and when the infant Jesus was brought into the temple, she gave

thanks unto the Lord and spoke of Him to those looking for redemption in Jerusalem. The historical setting is important. Anna lived under the law, before Christ's finished work at Calvary and before the full revelation of the New Testament Church. Her prophetic role must not be transformed into an automatic qualification for church offices in the present dispensation. Nevertheless, her testimony demonstrates a valuable principle: widowhood did not make her spiritually useless. Her earthly marriage had ended, but her devotion to God had not. She did not spend the remainder of life insisting that meaningful service had been buried with her husband. She continued faithfully within the circumstances and revelation God had given her. That example ought to encourage surviving spouses who wonder whether their remaining years can possess spiritual significance.

Acts 9:36–39 introduces Dorcas, a disciple at Joppa described as “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.” When she died, widows stood by Peter, weeping and displaying the garments she had made. The account concerns Peter's ministry and the remarkable raising of Dorcas, but the evidence of her service should not be overlooked. Those widows possessed tangible reminders of her care. Her usefulness had been expressed through ordinary acts of generosity and practical labour rather than public recognition. First Timothy 5:10 likewise identifies good works, hospitality, assistance to afflicted believers, and diligence in Christian service as marks of a faithful widow. Such passages correct the idea that usefulness belongs only to married people raising families or to individuals occupying visible offices. A surviving spouse may possess experience, biblical knowledge, practical abilities, financial resources, and compassion that can strengthen others. **The Lord can use hands that once cared for a husband or wife to care for the brethren, and He can use a life acquainted with sorrow to encourage someone else walking through it.**

Philippians 3:13–14 records Paul's determination to forget the things behind and reach forth unto those things before, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Paul is discussing his spiritual pursuit and calling, not commanding bereaved Christians to erase their memories or pretend that faithful earthly relationships never existed. The principle nevertheless reminds believers that Christian responsibility continues while earthly life remains. The surviving spouse should treasure what was honourable in the past without allowing the past to consume every remaining opportunity. First Corinthians 15:58 declares, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” That tremendous conclusion follows Paul's doctrinal exposition of resurrection. Because Christ is risen and the believer's future resurrection is certain, present Christian labour possesses enduring significance. **Death may change the**

company in your earthly household, but it does not change the Lord who owns your life or the eternal value of serving Him faithfully.

Conclusion

The Scriptures do not treat every unmarried person as though the circumstances producing singleness were identical. The lifelong unmarried believer, the widow, the widower, the abandoned spouse, and the divorced Christian may face substantially different questions requiring distinct biblical answers. First Corinthians 7 establishes liberty concerning remarriage after the death of a spouse while also recognizing the advantages that may accompany remaining unmarried. First Timothy 5 identifies serious responsibilities toward widows, and James 1:27 emphasizes the importance of practical compassion. The passages concerning divorce and separation require careful examination rather than careless slogans. Throughout these matters, one principle remains firm: belonging to Jesus Christ establishes a spiritual relationship that earthly circumstances cannot cancel. Colossians 2:10 declares that believers are complete in Him. That completeness does not depend upon the continued presence of a husband or wife. **The death of a spouse may empty a chair, and the destruction of a marriage may change an entire household, but neither possesses the power to empty the promises of God.**

The local church must therefore examine its conduct toward those who become single again. It must not treat widows as ceremonial objects of sympathy, widowers as forgotten men, or divorced believers as convenient subjects for gossip. It must teach biblical standards honestly while showing compassion toward genuine suffering. Families must honour legitimate responsibilities toward dependent relatives, and congregations must care for those whose needs cannot properly be met elsewhere. Married Christians should remember that the surviving spouse who receives considerable attention during a funeral may face difficult circumstances long after everybody else has returned to ordinary life. Unmarried believers should cultivate wholesome fellowship without allowing isolation to become permanent. Those considering remarriage must exercise biblical discernment rather than permit grief, finances, or loneliness to govern their decisions. **Christian compassion is not merely saying the right thing when somebody suffers. It is remaining faithful when the suffering continues after the sympathetic speeches have ended.** Sound doctrine must produce conduct worthy of the Saviour whose name the Church bears.

So if you have buried a faithful husband or wife, remember that the years you shared were not wasted simply because death brought them to an earthly conclusion. If you have endured abandonment or the destruction of a marriage, do not permit another person's wrongdoing or your own past failures to become the final definition of your life. Examine

your circumstances honestly before Scripture, maintain a clear conscience, seek sound counsel, and walk according to the light God has given. If remarriage is lawful and appropriate, approach it with wisdom and purity. If you remain unmarried, do not imagine that your remaining years have lost their purpose. Study the Bible, maintain fellowship, encourage the brethren, help those in need, support the gospel, and continue faithfully in the work of the Lord. The same Jesus Christ who saved you before your marriage, sustained you during it, and remained faithful through your sorrow is still your Saviour today. **An earthly marriage may end, but the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ does not. The years behind you may contain memories that can never be replaced, but the years before you still contain responsibilities that must not be wasted. You may be single again, but you have not been abandoned by God, dismissed from His service, or disqualified from living a life that honours the One who redeemed you.**

10 of 10 — Singleness and Service — No Wedding Ring Required in Glory: Living for the Marriage That Matters Eternally

Key Passage — Matthew 22:30 (KJV): "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

There is going to come a day when the wedding photographs have faded, the marriage certificates have become historical documents, the anniversary celebrations have ended, and every earthly husband and wife has reached the boundary beyond which the present marriage arrangement does not continue. That ought to sober a generation of Christians who have managed to turn marriage into the supreme achievement of human existence. The Lord Jesus Christ said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage." Apparently, heaven will not be divided into an exclusive section for married Christians and a waiting room for those who never found a spouse. There will be no unmarried believers standing around the resurrection wondering whether they missed the opportunity to become complete. The saved sinner's completeness is in Jesus Christ, not in a wedding ceremony. Marriage is an honourable institution established by God, but it was never intended to become the final destination of the Christian life. **A wedding ring may identify an earthly relationship, but it cannot improve upon the eternal relationship established by the blood of Jesus Christ.**

Now understand that this truth does not diminish marriage. God established marriage before sin entered the world, commanded faithfulness within it, and used the relationship between husband and wife to illustrate profound spiritual truth concerning Christ and His

Church. A faithful marriage can provide companionship, encourage holiness, strengthen a household, and become a testimony of sacrificial love. The Bible does not require anybody to despise those blessings in order to recognize their temporary nature. But there is a serious difference between appreciating something God has given and making that blessing the foundation of personal identity. Some Christians speak as though life cannot become meaningful until somebody walks down the aisle. Others act as though remaining unmarried represents a permanent spiritual deficiency. Both have allowed earthly expectations to overshadow eternal truth. The same Bible that declares marriage honourable also identifies believers as complete in Christ. The earthly institution must never be promoted above the heavenly reality it was designed to illustrate.

The Christian must therefore learn to examine earthly relationships in the light of eternity. A husband will answer to God for his responsibilities toward his wife. A wife will answer for her responsibilities within marriage. An unmarried believer will answer for the opportunities and duties entrusted to him. All will stand before the same Lord, and none will possess a superior salvation because of marital status. Ephesians 5:32 reveals a great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, while Revelation 19:7 announces the marriage of the Lamb. Those passages direct our attention beyond the temporary arrangements of earthly life toward the Saviour and His redeemed people. There is a coming resurrection, a heavenly citizenship, a future accounting for Christian service, and an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. These realities should govern how believers live now. **The Christian life does not begin at the wedding altar, and its ultimate purpose does not end at the grave. It begins with redemption and reaches into eternity through the risen Saviour.**

1. The Sadducees Asked the Wrong Question About Eternity

Matthew 22:23 introduces the Sadducees, “which say that there is no resurrection.” That statement is essential to understanding the passage. These men were not sincerely seeking instruction concerning the future of marriage. They denied the resurrection and intended to embarrass Jesus Christ with a question designed to make resurrection appear ridiculous. They presented the case of a woman whose husband died without children and who subsequently married his brothers in succession, following the levirate arrangement associated with Deuteronomy 25:5–10. Eventually, all seven brothers died, and the woman died also. Then came their clever question: “Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.” They thought they had constructed an impossible situation. Seven husbands, one woman, and a resurrection they did not believe existed. What a magnificent little trap! Unfortunately for them, they had brought their religious puzzle to the One who created life and possessed authority over death.

The Lord answered in Matthew 22:29, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” There is the diagnosis of their problem. They were attempting to evaluate resurrection according to the limitations of present earthly relationships while ignoring both Scripture and divine power. Verse 30 supplies the correction: “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” Notice the precision. Christ did not say resurrected people become angels. He said they are as the angels in the matter under discussion. Neither does the passage declare that people cease to possess personal identity or that everything meaningful about earthly relationships disappears. The point is that marriage does not continue as an institution entered or perpetuated in the resurrected condition. The Sadducees had constructed their argument upon an assumption the Lord rejected. **You cannot defeat the doctrine of resurrection by demanding that eternity operate according to the domestic arrangements of this present world.**

Christ continued by directing their attention to Exodus 3, where God identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Matthew 22:32 records His declaration, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” The immediate dispute concerned resurrection within Israel's scriptural setting, and Christ answered His opponents from the writings they ought to have understood. We must not pretend that Matthew 22 contains every doctrinal detail later revealed concerning the Church's resurrection and glorification. Those truths are developed further in passages such as 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. Nevertheless, Christ's answer establishes that resurrection life cannot be reduced to a continuation of existing earthly conditions. Death is not the final authority, and marriage is not the ultimate purpose of existence. The Sadducees tried to make eternity serve their argument. Christ made their argument bow before eternity. Their mistake remains common today whenever Christians imagine that heaven must reproduce every arrangement they consider necessary for happiness on earth.

2. Marriage Was Established for Earth, Not as the Foundation of Eternity

Genesis 2:18 declares, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” God established marriage in the original creation before Adam's fall. Genesis 2:24 describes the man leaving father and mother and cleaving unto his wife, with the two becoming one flesh. This institution was not invented by civil government, religious tradition, or the modern wedding industry. It originated with the Creator. Marriage provides the proper relationship for the physical union of husband and wife, establishes domestic responsibilities, and supplies the foundational household arrangement described in Scripture. Yet the historical setting matters. Adam stood at the beginning of human history, and God's provision addressed his particular circumstances

and the establishment of mankind. The passage does not command every subsequent individual to marry. The New Testament recognizes lawful singleness, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself lived His earthly life unmarried. God's design for marriage must be honoured without manufacturing a commandment that Scripture never gave.

Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” Ephesians 5:25 commands husbands to love their wives “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” These are substantial responsibilities. A husband is not merely a man who acquired a companion, and a wife is not merely a woman who obtained a new title. Marriage involves sacrifice, fidelity, and obedience before God. It should never be treated as disposable simply because its earthly arrangement does not continue unchanged in resurrection. But neither should marriage be treated as a saving ordinance or a guarantee of spiritual maturity. A lost man can become a husband and remain lost. A lost woman can become a wife and remain unregenerate. Two sinners can exchange vows before a preacher and leave the building without either having received eternal life. **A wedding ceremony can establish an earthly marriage, but it cannot accomplish the new birth. The preacher may pronounce two people husband and wife; only God can make a sinner a new creature in Christ.**

First Corinthians 7 provides the necessary balance. Paul declares in verse 28, “But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned,” while verses 32–35 recognize advantages associated with remaining unmarried and attending upon the Lord without distraction. Marriage is honourable, and singleness can be useful. Neither condition establishes superiority before God. Romans 7:2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 recognize that death ends the earthly marriage bond, permitting the surviving spouse to remarry within biblical boundaries. The fact that death terminates that bond does not make the marriage meaningless. The faithfulness, sacrifice, and obedience demonstrated within it remain significant. But it does establish that marriage belongs to a temporary earthly order. The Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ rests upon something infinitely more enduring. **A husband and wife may share fifty years together, and those years may be precious beyond description. But fifty years, however wonderful, cannot become the standard by which an eternal salvation is measured.**

3. The Great Mystery Is Christ and His Church

Ephesians 5:25–27 declares, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Notice how Paul directs the discussion. He begins with the husband's responsibility, but he establishes the

pattern through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ for the Church. Christ gave Himself for His people. Their redemption rests upon His finished work, not upon their marital circumstances or personal achievements. The washing of water by the Word concerns His sanctifying work, not an argument that physical water accomplishes regeneration. The Church's ultimate presentation in glory is grounded in the Saviour's purpose and provision. The human marriage relationship illustrates something greater than itself. The earthly picture receives its meaning from the heavenly reality, not the other way around.

Verses 30–32 continue, “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.” Paul then quotes the one-flesh principle from Genesis 2:24 before declaring, “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” There is the inspired interpretation. The mystery concerns Christ and His Church. The Church is His body, composed of saved believers united to Him through the work of the Holy Ghost. First Corinthians 12:13 explains that believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles. This is not a declaration that the Church has replaced Israel or inherited every national covenant promise made to Abraham's physical descendants. Israel and the Church must be distinguished according to Scripture. Nor is Paul teaching that each individual Christian must experience an earthly marriage to participate in this spiritual relationship. The body of Christ includes married and unmarried believers alike. **The Church's relationship to Christ does not depend upon how many of its members have exchanged earthly wedding vows.**

Second Corinthians 11:2 adds another tremendous statement: “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Paul is addressing the Corinthian believers and emphasizing their devotion to Jesus Christ. The following verses warn against deception, another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel. The bridal language therefore carries a serious doctrinal responsibility. The Church must remain faithful to the Saviour and the truth revealed through His apostles. This is not an invitation to substitute romantic imagination for biblical doctrine or to picture every Christian as an individual earthly bride of Christ. The relationship is corporate, involving the redeemed Church united to its Head. Neither does the language authorize false teaching that salvation must be maintained through human merit. The believer is saved by grace through faith, but the saved are called to doctrinal fidelity and holy conduct. **A church that boasts about being the Bride while tolerating another gospel has managed to admire the wedding garments while betraying the Bridegroom's Word.**

4. The Marriage of the Lamb Is a Prophetic Reality, Not a Religious Metaphor Without Substance

Revelation 19 opens with rejoicing in heaven following the judgment of Babylon described in the preceding chapters. Verse 7 declares, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” This scene belongs to the prophetic sequence surrounding the conclusion of the Tribulation and the approaching visible return of Jesus Christ. Later in the chapter, heaven opens and the Rider upon the white horse appears as Faithful and True, followed by the armies of heaven. The marriage announcement must therefore be understood within the framework of Revelation rather than detached from its prophetic setting and reduced to a general illustration concerning personal happiness. In the pretribulational understanding of the Church's future, the redeemed Church has already been caught up to meet Christ before the judgments of that final period. The marriage of the Lamb displays the glorious relationship between the Saviour and His redeemed people. **The wedding that ought to command the Church's attention is not another earthly ceremony, but the prophetic triumph of the Lamb who purchased His people with His own blood.**

Revelation 19:8 declares, “And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” Notice first that the clothing is granted. The Church's standing before God does not originate in human righteousness or the accumulation of religious accomplishments. Ephesians 2:8–9 establishes salvation by grace through faith, while verse 10 explains that believers are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The redeemed are not saved by their works, but they are saved unto a life of faithful service. The righteousness identified with the fine linen must be considered alongside these distinctions rather than used to preach salvation by merit. First Corinthians 3:11–15 also reveals the future testing of Christian service, establishing the seriousness of works performed after salvation. The Church will be gloriously presented to Christ, and the redeemed should live now in a manner consistent with belonging to Him. Grace is not an excuse for a filthy testimony. It is the foundation upon which faithful service must rest.

Verse 9 announces, “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” The passage distinguishes the wife mentioned in verses 7–8 from those described as called to the supper, and that distinction deserves attention. Scripture must be allowed to establish its prophetic categories rather than permitting religious imagination to assign every participant a role it has not clearly identified. Revelation 21:2 later describes the holy city, new Jerusalem, prepared “as a bride adorned for her husband,” while verse 9 introduces a vision of “the bride, the Lamb's wife.” The city contains features associated with Israel's twelve tribes and the twelve apostles of the Lamb, so its symbolism should not be handled carelessly or used to erase distinctions God has revealed. These prophetic pictures are magnificent, but their interpretation must remain governed by the actual text.

One truth is beyond dispute: Jesus Christ is the central Person. **Heaven is not preparing an elaborate celebration to congratulate human beings for becoming religiously successful. It is displaying the glory of the Lamb who redeemed them.**

5. Our Conversation Is in Heaven, and Our Bodies Await Redemption

Philippians 3:20–21 declares, “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.” That passage identifies the believer's heavenly citizenship and future bodily transformation. The Christian's final hope is not the acquisition of an earthly relationship, a larger home, or a more comfortable life. It is the return of Jesus Christ and the glorification He has promised. The same Saviour who redeemed the soul will complete the believer's bodily redemption. Romans 8:23 speaks of Christians waiting for “the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” This transformation has nothing to do with whether somebody married during earthly life. The Lord will not transform married believers into glorious bodies while leaving unmarried Christians waiting for supplementary qualifications. **The resurrection does not require a wedding certificate. It requires the redeeming power of Jesus Christ.**

First Thessalonians 4:13–18 reveals the Christian's blessed hope concerning the dead in Christ and the living believers who remain until the Lord's coming. Verse 16 declares, “the dead in Christ shall rise first,” and verse 17 explains that living believers shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. Paul concludes, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Notice where the emphasis falls. The promise centers upon Christ, resurrection, reunion with the redeemed, and everlasting fellowship with the Lord. It does not promise that every earthly marital arrangement will continue unchanged. Neither does it describe heaven as a place where widows must recover their former domestic responsibilities or lifelong singles must finally locate a spouse. The Christian's comfort comes from the resurrection and the presence of Jesus Christ. Earthly relationships have meaning, and the loss of believing loved ones brings genuine sorrow. But the ultimate answer to death is not another earthly household. It is the risen Saviour who has conquered the grave.

First Corinthians 15 develops the doctrine of resurrection with extraordinary clarity. Paul explains the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the future resurrection of those who belong to Him, and the transformation awaiting believers. Verse 51 declares, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” Verse 53 adds, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” The passage concerns a divine transformation far exceeding anything earthly marriage can

accomplish. The believer's present body is subject to weakness, aging, sickness, and death, but the resurrection promises incorruption and immortality through the victory of Jesus Christ. Marriage cannot conquer death. A wedding ring cannot prevent the grave. Human affection, however sincere, cannot produce a glorified body. Only Christ possesses the power necessary to accomplish what Scripture promises. **The Christian's ultimate completion is not found in somebody standing beside him at an altar, but in the risen Lord who will raise and transform His redeemed people.**

6. The Judgment Seat Will Examine Faithfulness, Not Marital Status

Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” This is a solemn statement concerning believers and their accountability to Jesus Christ. It must not be confused with the Great White Throne judgment described in Revelation 20, where the final judgment of the lost is revealed. Salvation is by grace through faith, not a reward purchased through good works. Nevertheless, the redeemed will answer for the stewardship of their earthly lives. First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that Christian works will be tested, with reward or loss resulting from that evaluation. Notice what Scripture does not identify as the standard. It does not declare that marriage itself guarantees a reward or that singleness automatically produces spiritual superiority. **The Lord will not examine your wedding album to determine whether you were a faithful Christian. He will examine what you did with the life He entrusted to you.**

A married Christian bears responsibilities appropriate to marriage. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives sacrificially and addresses the responsibilities of wives within the household. First Timothy 5:8 warns concerning neglect of those for whom one ought to provide. An unmarried Christian bears responsibilities appropriate to his own circumstances, including purity, stewardship, service, and faithfulness to the local church. First Corinthians 7:32–35 recognizes that unmarried believers may possess freedom to attend upon the Lord without certain domestic distractions. Yet freedom does not automatically produce reward. An unmarried believer can squander decades upon selfish pursuits just as a married believer can neglect his family. Both must answer for the opportunities they received. The Lord does not require every Christian to accomplish identical tasks, but He does require faithfulness. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” That is the standard worth remembering when the world's measurements begin appearing more important than the Word of God.

Consider the tragedy of a Christian who spends fifty years waiting for a marriage that never comes, postponing Bible study, evangelism, service, and spiritual growth until some imagined future arrangement becomes reality. Consider equally the married Christian who becomes so occupied with building an impressive earthly household that the things of God receive whatever attention remains after every personal ambition has been satisfied. Both have allowed temporary circumstances to govern eternal priorities. Ephesians 5:16 commands believers to redeem the time because the days are evil. First Corinthians 15:58 commands them to be steadfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing their labour is not in vain in Him. These commands do not expire when somebody marries or remain suspended until somebody does. **The tragedy is not that a Christian may live without a spouse. The tragedy is that he may possess a lifetime of opportunities to serve Jesus Christ and spend those years waiting for permission to begin.**

7. Live for the Bridegroom Instead of Worshipping the Wedding

Colossians 3:1–4 commands believers to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and to set their affection on things above rather than on things on the earth. Verse 4 declares, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Notice the expression, “Christ, who is our life.” Paul does not say marriage is our life, singleness is our life, personal independence is our life, or domestic happiness is our life. Christ is our life. That truth confronts both the unmarried person who has made finding a spouse the supreme ambition of existence and the married person who has allowed earthly family relationships to occupy the place belonging to God. It also confronts the unmarried Christian who worships independence and refuses every responsibility that might inconvenience his preferred lifestyle. **Anything that becomes more important than obeying Jesus Christ has become too important, even when the thing itself is honourable.**

Romans 12:1 calls believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable unto God, which is their reasonable service. First Peter 4:10 commands Christians to minister their gifts to one another as faithful stewards of God's grace. Those responsibilities apply regardless of earthly marital circumstances. The unmarried Christian can study Scripture, witness to the lost, support missionaries, encourage struggling believers, assist the local church, and cultivate godly fellowship. The married Christian can serve the Lord faithfully within his household and beyond it, without neglecting the responsibilities God has assigned. Neither has permission to become spiritually idle. Neither should treat the other's circumstances with contempt. The Church is one body with many members, and its unity rests in Jesus Christ rather than identical domestic

arrangements. The purpose of Christian living is not to prove that marriage is better than singleness or singleness better than marriage. It is to glorify the Saviour whose blood purchased every redeemed member.

The believer must also guard against turning the hope of eternity into an excuse for neglecting present obligations. Because earthly marriage is temporary, it does not follow that husbands may neglect their wives or wives disregard their responsibilities. Because the unmarried Christian is complete in Christ, it does not follow that he may ignore the need for friendship, purity, or Christian service. Scripture never uses future glory to excuse present disobedience. Titus 2:11–13 declares that the grace of God teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of Jesus Christ. Notice that eternal expectation produces present responsibility. The Christian who genuinely anticipates meeting the Lord ought to be concerned about the manner in which he lives now. **Looking for the Bridegroom does not excuse neglecting the work He has commanded. It makes that work all the more urgent.**

Conclusion

Marriage is honourable, but it is not eternal redemption. Singleness may be useful, but it is not automatic sanctification. A Christian may spend earthly life beside a faithful spouse, or he may serve the Lord without ever entering marriage. He may experience the sorrow of widowhood, the disappointment of an anticipated marriage that never comes, or the blessings of an honourable household established according to Scripture. These circumstances matter, and God has provided instruction concerning them. But none determines whether a sinner has been redeemed by Jesus Christ. Matthew 22:30 establishes that earthly marriage does not continue in the same arrangement in resurrection. Ephesians 5 reveals the great mystery concerning Christ and His Church. Revelation 19 announces the marriage of the Lamb. Together, these passages direct our attention beyond earthly ceremonies toward the Saviour and His redeemed people. **The wedding ring belongs to the present life; the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ reaches beyond the grave.**

The Church ought to stop treating marriage as the final measure of spiritual success. Married believers must honour their responsibilities without looking down upon those who remain unmarried. Unmarried believers must serve the Lord without treating their condition as an excuse for bitterness, laziness, or spiritual superiority. Those who desire marriage may pursue it lawfully and prayerfully, but they must not postpone obedience until a spouse appears. Those who have lost a husband or wife must remember that earthly bereavement cannot dissolve their relationship with the risen Saviour. The coming

Judgment Seat of Christ should bring every believer's priorities into proper focus. The Lord will evaluate faithfulness, not social popularity. The things accomplished for His glory will possess eternal significance, while the achievements that impressed men may prove worthless under divine examination. **A wedding can fill a church building with guests, flowers, and beautiful music, but none of those things can substitute for a life faithfully surrendered to Jesus Christ.**

So let this truth settle the matter. If you are married, love your spouse, honour your vows, fulfil your biblical responsibilities, and remember that your marriage should direct attention toward the Lord rather than replace Him. If you are unmarried, maintain your purity, develop Christian fellowship, study the Scriptures, serve the brethren, and refuse to measure your life by a wedding that has not occurred. If marriage comes, receive it honourably. If it never comes, continue faithfully. One day the Lord Jesus Christ will call His redeemed people into glory, and every earthly distinction that men have used to measure spiritual importance will be seen in the light of eternity. There will be no second-class redeemed sinners standing outside because they failed to acquire a wedding ring. Every saved member of Christ's body belongs to Him by grace. The final question will not be whether somebody married, but whether he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and how faithfully he served the Saviour who redeemed him. **You do not need a wedding ring to belong to the Bride. You need to belong to Jesus Christ. And when the Lamb receives the glory that is His due, no earthly marriage certificate will improve upon the eternal privilege of being His.**

Conclusion to Singleness and Service — Whole in Christ Without a Wedding Ring

After examining what the King James Bible says about singleness, marriage, companionship, purity, Christian fellowship, service, widowhood, and eternity, one truth ought to stand out as plainly as the words printed on the page: **Jesus Christ never needed a wedding ring to make a redeemed sinner complete.** Colossians 2:10 declares, “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.” There is the foundation of the entire matter. Not complete in a husband, not complete in a wife, not complete in a household filled with children, and not complete in the approval of relatives who believe everybody ought to marry before reaching a certain birthday. Complete in Him. The world has spent generations teaching people to measure their worth by who loves them, who wants them, who marries them, and who stands beside them in the family photograph. Unfortunately, a fair number of Christians have borrowed that same

measuring stick, covered it with religious language, and attempted to pass it off as biblical wisdom. But the blood of Jesus Christ does not require additional assistance from a marriage certificate. A wedding ceremony may change your earthly condition, but it cannot improve upon the redemption purchased at Calvary.

Throughout these studies, we have established that marriage is honourable because God established it. Genesis 2 records the creation of the woman and the institution of marriage, while Hebrews 13:4 declares, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled.” Ephesians 5 establishes serious responsibilities concerning husbands and wives, including the husband's obligation to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. These are not insignificant matters. A faithful Christian marriage can demonstrate sacrificial love, mutual responsibility, godly companionship, and obedience to the Lord. But nowhere does Scripture command every Christian to marry. Nowhere does it establish a universal age for marriage, promise every believer a particular spouse, or declare that unmarried adults are spiritually unfinished. The same apostle who instructed husbands and wives also wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:8, “It is good for them if they abide even as I.” Apparently, the Holy Ghost was not consulted when somebody invented the idea that a Christian cannot amount to anything without a spouse. **Marriage is God's institution, but mandatory marriage for every believer is man's invention. The difference ought to matter to anybody who claims to believe the Bible.**

We have also seen that Paul did not regard remaining unmarried as an embarrassing condition requiring an apology. First Corinthians 7:32–35 explains that unmarried believers may possess particular opportunities to attend upon the things of the Lord without certain domestic distractions. That does not mean marriage is inferior, sinful, or unsuitable for faithful Christian service. It means that different earthly circumstances carry different responsibilities. A husband must care for his wife, and a wife has legitimate responsibilities toward her husband. Parents must provide for and instruct their children. These obligations require time, energy, sacrifice, and attention. An unmarried Christian may possess greater freedom in some of these areas, and that freedom can become a tremendous advantage when placed at the disposal of Jesus Christ. But freedom is not the same thing as faithfulness. A man can remain unmarried for fifty years and squander practically every opportunity God gives him. Another can use those same years to study the Scriptures, preach the gospel, strengthen the brethren, support missionaries, and accomplish work whose influence continues long after he has departed this world. **The absence of domestic obligations does not automatically produce devotion to God. It merely provides opportunities that devotion ought to use.**

Then there is the matter of loneliness, which ought to be addressed with considerably more biblical understanding than the shallow religious slogans so frequently offered to people who live alone. There is a difference between never having married, remaining unmarried by choice, waiting for a suitable relationship, and burying the person with whom you shared forty years of earthly life. Those circumstances are not identical, and the Christian who treats them as though they were has mistaken cheerful conversation for spiritual discernment. The Bible does not condemn the ordinary desire for companionship. It does not command the unmarried believer to pretend that an empty house is always pleasant or that loneliness disappears through sufficient religious enthusiasm. Hebrews 13:5 records the Lord's promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” That promise is not a guarantee of earthly marriage. It is something greater. Human beings may leave, relationships may end, and death may separate loved ones for the remainder of earthly life, but God remains faithful to His redeemed people. **An empty chair is not proof of an absent Saviour, and a quiet house cannot cancel a promise spoken by the living God.**

Biblical contentment, therefore, must never be confused with pretending that difficult circumstances are enjoyable. Philippians 4:11 records Paul's testimony: “for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Notice that contentment was learned. It was not produced by receiving everything Paul desired, and it was not dependent upon life becoming comfortable. The apostle knew how to abound and how to suffer need. He understood hunger, hardship, disappointment, and the failure of human assistance. Yet he could declare in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” That statement concerns Christ's strength for faithfulness through changing circumstances, not a promise that God will supply every personal ambition according to an earthly timetable. An unmarried Christian may desire marriage and remain content in the Lord. A widow may mourn her husband and continue trusting God. A widower may struggle with loneliness without surrendering to despair. **Contentment is not the absence of desire. It is the refusal to allow an unfulfilled desire to become more important than obedience to Jesus Christ.**

We have also confronted the dangerous habit of allowing the desire for marriage to become an excuse for compromising biblical convictions. Some Christians become so afraid of remaining unmarried that they begin overlooking matters they once recognized as serious spiritual warnings. A man who has defended sound doctrine for years suddenly discovers that doctrinal agreement is no longer particularly important because an attractive woman has shown interest. A woman who once insisted upon a godly husband begins explaining away unbelief, immorality, dishonesty, or spiritual indifference because somebody has finally offered companionship. Then the excuses begin. He is a good person. She has a wonderful personality. We love one another. God understands our situation. We intend to

marry eventually. Wonderful! Apparently, romantic interest has become the newest method of correcting the Bible. Yet 2 Corinthians 6:14 still warns against unequal yokes, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3 still commands believers to abstain from fornication. **The Lord has never authorized a Christian to purchase companionship at the price of disobedience. A relationship that requires you to abandon Scripture is already demanding more than any earthly relationship deserves.**

Sexual purity remains an obligation whether a person marries young, marries late, or never marries at all. First Corinthians 6:19–20 declares that the believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost and that Christians are not their own because they have been bought with a price. The flesh does not receive a special exemption because marriage has been delayed. Pornography does not become respectable because somebody lives alone. Fornication does not become lawful because two people intend to exchange vows eventually. Secret relationships, emotional manipulation, inappropriate familiarity, and deliberate indulgence of lust do not become righteous through the invention of more sympathetic vocabulary. Yet the same standard applies to married believers. A wedding ring does not give a husband permission to cultivate lust, and marriage does not excuse a wife from maintaining purity and faithfulness. God has established one standard of holiness for His redeemed people. The unmarried believer must flee fornication, and the married believer must honour the marriage covenant. **The flesh may complain about the commandments, but the complaints of the flesh have never carried authority over the Word of God.**

Another matter that must not be forgotten is the responsibility of the local church toward unmarried believers. First Corinthians 12 identifies the Church as one body with many members, united through the work of the Holy Ghost. Romans 12 commands brotherly affection, mutual honour, hospitality, and practical concern. Yet some congregations have developed an arrangement in which nearly every fellowship activity assumes that everybody possesses a spouse and children. Married couples receive attention, parents receive instruction, families receive invitations, and the unmarried Christian is occasionally remembered when somebody needs an additional volunteer to rearrange the fellowship hall. That is not the biblical pattern of mutual care. A faithful unmarried believer is not an incomplete member of Christ's body. Neither is a widow merely an object of sympathy or a widower a problem requiring immediate remarriage. The Church should provide genuine fellowship, sound teaching, appropriate friendships, practical assistance, and opportunities for service without treating every unmarried adult as a matrimonial assignment. **The local church is the body of Christ, not a couples' club with a religious sign above the entrance.**

But unmarried Christians must also accept their own responsibilities concerning fellowship. Feeling overlooked does not authorize bitterness, selfishness, resentment, or permanent withdrawal from the brethren. Galatians 6:2 commands, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” That obligation applies in both directions. The unmarried Christian should not merely wait for invitations, attention, and assistance while refusing to cultivate genuine friendships or contribute to the needs of others. He can encourage struggling believers, visit the sick, help an elderly member, invite someone to share a meal, and participate in the ordinary responsibilities of Christian fellowship. Likewise, married believers must not assume that unmarried Christians have unlimited availability simply because they do not have spouses or children. Some work exhausting hours, care for aging relatives, or carry serious responsibilities of their own. Christian fellowship requires mutual consideration rather than social assumptions. **The measure of brotherly love is not how successfully a congregation organizes people according to their households, but how faithfully its members care for one another as those who belong to Jesus Christ.**

We have also addressed the pressure that families and churches sometimes place upon unmarried Christians. The familiar question, “When are you getting married?” may begin as innocent curiosity, but repeated often enough it can become an unnecessary burden. Parents may desire grandchildren, relatives may want everybody settled, and friends may believe that marriage is the final evidence of successful adulthood. Yet the Lord has not established a universal wedding schedule. First Corinthians 7:24 declares, “Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.” Paul is not forbidding lawful changes of circumstance. He is establishing that faithful Christian living does not require every believer to occupy the same earthly position. Wise counsel should be welcomed, particularly concerning the seriousness of marriage, the character of prospective spouses, and the responsibilities involved. But human preference must never be promoted into divine commandment. **A birthday can tell you how long you have lived, but it cannot tell you whom God requires you to marry. The church gossip committee has no authority to establish a wedding date the Scriptures never supplied.**

The suffering of those who become single again also deserves particular consideration. A person who has buried a beloved spouse has not simply returned to the circumstances of youth. Years of companionship, shared responsibility, sacrifice, and memories cannot be dismissed by a convenient religious expression. The Scriptures recognize widowhood as a serious condition requiring compassion and, where appropriate, practical assistance. First Timothy 5 establishes responsibilities concerning widows and their relatives, while James 1:27 identifies care for the fatherless and widows in their affliction as part of pure religion before God. First Corinthians 7:39 also establishes that death releases the surviving

spouse from the earthly marriage bond and permits remarriage, “only in the Lord.” Yet remarriage is not compulsory, and remaining unmarried after bereavement is not evidence of spiritual superiority. Divorce and abandonment must be distinguished from widowhood because Scripture addresses those circumstances differently. Every situation deserves careful examination rather than careless assumptions. **Death may end an earthly marriage, but it does not erase the faithfulness invested in that marriage or dismiss the surviving Christian from the service of God.**

Perhaps one of the most important lessons in this entire study concerns what an unmarried Christian can accomplish when his life is deliberately placed at the Lord's disposal. Romans 12:11 commands believers to be “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” Ephesians 5:16 commands them to redeem the time because the days are evil. First Peter 4:10 instructs believers to minister their gifts as good stewards of God's grace. These commands apply regardless of marital status. An unmarried Christian may possess opportunities for Bible study, evangelism, teaching, writing, missionary assistance, hospitality, visitation, and practical helps that would be more difficult for someone carrying extensive domestic responsibilities. Those opportunities should not be wasted. Yet ministry must not become a religious excuse for neglecting employment, personal obligations, physical limitations, or legitimate rest. Stewardship requires wisdom as well as diligence. **The Lord has not commanded every unmarried Christian to become a missionary, but He has commanded every redeemed Christian to be faithful. A life without a spouse is not a life without a calling.**

And now we arrive at the eternal truth that places every earthly relationship in its proper perspective. In Matthew 22:30, the Lord Jesus Christ declared, “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.” He was answering the Sadducees concerning resurrection, exposing their ignorance of both the Scriptures and the power of God. His statement establishes that earthly marriage does not continue in the same arrangement in resurrection. That ought to correct the exaggerated importance sometimes assigned to marital status. Ephesians 5:32 reveals the great mystery concerning Christ and His Church, while Revelation 19:7 announces, “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” The earthly marriage relationship illustrates something greater than itself. The redeemed Church belongs to Jesus Christ, and that relationship rests upon His saving work rather than the domestic circumstances of individual believers. **The wedding ring belongs to this present world, but the redemption purchased by the Lamb reaches beyond the grave. Heaven will not divide the redeemed into first-class Christians who married and second-class Christians who did not.**

The believer's future also includes the promised resurrection and the Judgment Seat of Christ. Philippians 3:20–21 declares that our conversation is in heaven and that the Lord Jesus Christ will change our vile body to be fashioned like unto His glorious body. First Thessalonians 4:16–17 reveals the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the catching away of living believers to meet the Lord in the air. These promises do not depend upon whether somebody experienced an earthly marriage. They depend upon the saving work and resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Yet the Christian's eternal security does not eliminate accountability for earthly conduct. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” First Corinthians 3:11–15 explains that Christian works will be tested, with reward or loss resulting according to their character. The Lord will evaluate faithfulness, not social popularity. He will not require an unmarried Christian to produce a marriage certificate before examining his service. **The question will not be how successfully you arranged your earthly relationships, but how faithfully you served the Saviour who redeemed you.**

That ought to make every Christian reconsider what he is doing with the years God has given him. Some believers have spent enormous portions of their lives pursuing relationships that never developed, regretting marriages that never occurred, comparing themselves with others, or waiting for circumstances to become more favourable before beginning serious Christian service. Others have allowed the blessings of marriage and family to crowd out prayer, Scripture, evangelism, and fellowship with the Lord. Both errors arise when temporary earthly circumstances become more important than eternal responsibilities. Colossians 3:2 commands, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Verse 4 declares, “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Notice that expression: Christ, who is our life. Not marriage, not singleness, not independence, not human approval, and not the possession of an impressive household. Christ is our life. **Anything that becomes more important than obeying Jesus Christ has become too important, even when the thing itself is honourable.**

So let the married Christian honour his spouse, fulfil his biblical responsibilities, and recognize that marriage is a stewardship rather than a certificate of spiritual superiority. Let the unmarried Christian maintain purity, cultivate genuine fellowship, exercise wise judgment, and use his opportunities for the Lord instead of believing that meaningful life must begin after a wedding. Let the widow remember that bereavement cannot cancel the promises of God. Let the widower recognize that his remaining years still possess opportunities for faithful service. Let those who desire marriage pursue it within biblical boundaries without compromising doctrine or surrendering their consciences. And let the local church stop measuring believers according to the number of people appearing in

their family photographs. First Corinthians 4:2 declares, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” That is the standard. **God has not required every Christian to possess the same earthly circumstances. He has required every Christian to obey the same Lord.**

When the apostle Paul wrote, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” in Philippians 1:21, he expressed a purpose that ought to govern every redeemed life. His earthly existence was not organized around obtaining the comforts other people considered necessary for success. He lived for the Saviour who had redeemed him. That did not make earthly responsibilities meaningless, and it did not require every Christian to follow Paul's exact circumstances. It established the proper priority. The believer's highest calling is not to become somebody's husband or wife, although marriage may become an honourable part of that calling. His highest responsibility is to glorify Jesus Christ. When that purpose governs life, marriage can be received as a blessing without becoming an idol, and singleness can be lived faithfully without becoming a disgrace. The Christian can rejoice in legitimate earthly companionship while remembering that no human relationship can replace the Lord. **The greatest achievement of your earthly life will never be persuading somebody to love you. It will be faithfully serving the One who loved you and gave Himself for you.**

This series has therefore brought us back to the truth with which we began. Colossians 2:10 does not say that believers are nearly complete, provisionally complete, or complete only after satisfying the expectations of respectable Christian society. It says, “And ye are complete in him.” That is the verdict of God concerning those who belong to Jesus Christ. It does not eliminate the believer's responsibility to grow in grace, maintain holiness, or fulfil earthly obligations. It establishes the foundation upon which those responsibilities must be performed. The unmarried Christian is not an unfinished person waiting for another human being to supply what Christ supposedly failed to provide. The married Christian is not spiritually superior because he possesses an earthly companion. Both belong to the Lord through the same redemption, and both must walk according to His Word. **A wedding can change your name, your address, your household, and your responsibilities. It cannot make the blood of Jesus Christ more sufficient than it already is.**

So whether you are married, unmarried, widowed, waiting, content, lonely, hopeful, or carrying disappointments that nobody else fully understands, do not allow your earthly circumstances to become the final measure of your life. Open your King James Bible and believe what God has said. If you are lost, your greatest need is not a husband or wife but salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for your sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. If you are saved, your greatest responsibility is to live for the Saviour

who purchased you with His blood. Study His Word. Maintain your purity. Love the brethren. Support the gospel. Redeem the time. Serve faithfully. One day every earthly opportunity will be finished, every temporary arrangement will have reached its appointed boundary, and the redeemed will stand before the Lord whose glory will outshine every achievement that once impressed this world. **You do not need a wedding ring to be complete in Christ, and you do not need an earthly marriage to possess an eternal future with Him. Marriage is honourable, singleness is not a disgrace, and faithfulness is never wasted. Live for Jesus Christ now, because when eternity arrives, the only relationship that can save your soul is the one established through His finished work at Calvary.**

