

# Living on the Threshold of Eternity

An exposition of 1 Corinthians 7:25-31  
at West Hills Evergreen on March 11, 2018

**INTRODUCTION:** Inflight passenger safety demonstration...doors are closing, this is a non-smoking flight...please direct your attention to the flight attendant, here is where the safety exits are located, here is how to fasten your seat belt, oxygen masks, emergency exits, safety lights, floatation devices...

Think about if you knew there was going to be an in-air emergency that would require a sudden, dangerous landing mid-flight. How would that change the way you listened to the instructions. How would that change what you do with your luggage...how you talk with your spouse, or kids, or friend, or the person on the flight next to you...knowing that this flight was going to come to a dangerous and sudden end and that this crisis was imminent and unavoidable...

**PROBLEM:** Most people I think...struggle with falling into the rut of waking up every morning and think about your life in light of the anxieties of the day, your day in light of the week, and if you are intentional with your calendar, your week in light of the month. All of us, to some degree or another struggle with letting our mind drift as the instructions are read...you feel your phone vibrate and become overwhelmed with the need to see what it is...you remember something you forgot, your mind drifts to an interaction you had earlier in the day. And the reason our minds drift is because we have lost that razor sharp, pins and needles awareness that you are on the verge of an imminent and unavoidable crisis and how you use the remaining moments or your life may be a matter of life and death.

Every time you open your bible, inflight passenger safety demonstration starts...for your life. Wake up...the time is short...your affections are being pulled from finding your complete joy in Christ...your priorities and your life are slipping into a mechanical grind from task A to task B to task C...and your Christian life is taking more and more of a backseat to the other stuff you are busy doing...DANGER...CRISIS is coming...SIT UP...LISTEN...the fate of your immortal soul may be at stake. In today's passage...Paul is concerned to show us how the dawn of the kingdom of God in the world is meant to call you out of a thoughtless mechanistic life-grind and into a razor sharp...pins and needles awareness of the future that is breaking into the present...here is my main point today:

**MAIN POINT:** You live on the threshold of eternity, so live like it.

**SETTING THE CONTEXT:** Please open your bibles to 1 Corinthians 7 verse 25. We are inserting ourselves back into Paul's discussion of how to engage various aspects of this present life on the basis of a principle he laid down earlier, to remain as we are. Becoming a Christian is not equivalent to quitting your job, withdrawing from your marriage, or suddenly feeling the need to get married, or changing your cultural or ethnic affiliation. And much of chapter 7 has been concerned with talking down various members of the church who were really excited to know Christ and in response to their new faith are actively over-reacting to their cultures sins by

over applying biblical truth. And the most obvious example of that is in the area of sexuality. In Corinth, sexual sin was everywhere, it was like fast food, cheap, convenient and ubiquitous or everywhere. And so when Christ broke into their lives...they wanted to get as far away from that former depravity as possible to the extent that even married people were being told that they should not be intimate with each other.

And Paul's great burden there was to show that the goal is to glorify God, not be celibate. And the way you glorify God in singleness is by celibacy but the way you glorify God in marriage is by healthy frequent intimacy. In both situations though...you should strive to glorify God where God has called you. You don't need to make some significant change in your life circumstances in order to live a holy God-ward life...you can do that in whatever situation you are in. Strive for holiness where you are...you are not going to get more of God by pretending you are something you are not. And of course last week, Paul added some nuance to that...he is not saying don't change your circumstances no matter what...he clarifies that if you are going to make a change...make a change that will enable you to better glorify God. The fundamental issue is still the same...do stuff for God's glory...don't do stuff so that you can feel more spiritual than others...don't do stuff for more stuff...don't look for happiness in God in a change of circumstances...look for happiness in God by trying to glorify and enjoy Him where you are...which may or may not include pursuing more freedom to grow spiritually, or getting more stuff, or changing your circumstances. And so now Paul turns his attention to those who are engaged...which will give way to how we should think about everything in life in light of the future that is upon us...so please direct your attention to the front of the cabin...death or the end of the world is coming so listen closely to what God is about to say to you...let's humble our minds and open our hearts, the One who made the heavens and the earth is about to speak...

**READING:** (1 Cor 7:25–31) “Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. [26] I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. [27] Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. [28] But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. [29] This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, [30] and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, [31] and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.”

**PRAYER:** The heavens will vanish like smoke, the world will be consumed like an old garment...all flesh is like grass and like the flowers of the grass...yet you have ordained our immortal souls to live forever...incline our hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ as we prepare to enter into the fullness of the ever increasing joys of eternal life. Amen.

**ROAD MAP:** 1.) How to make relationship decisions in Christ, 2.) Processing all decisions in light of the times, and 3.) Walking with God on the threshold of eternity

## How to make relationship decisions in Christ

I feel like this first heading sounds like I'm about to start a Song of Solomon summer series on dating but I wasn't sure what else to call this.

*Paul is going to give four pieces of extremely practical input on how to make godly relationship decisions...and so if you are in a season of life where that is relevant to you listen up...and for those of you who aren't in that season of life...it is likely that you will be in a position to give input some day to someone who IS IN this season of life so listen with that in mind.*

1. Let me start by setting the context. Paul says: "Now concerning the betrothed"...concerning those who are engaged to be married to another person but who have not yet consummated this marriage either by ceremony or by sexual intimacy. And the fact that Paul uses the word betrothed and not the word engaged should cause you to stop and consider the fact that Paul is writing to a cultural situation that is very different than our own.
  1. In the Roman world...people didn't, typically, fall in love, get engaged, and then plan their dream wedding. The world didn't work like that. If you as a single person wanted to get married you didn't go on dates...you told your parents, I want to get married. And then your parents would try and find you a marriage partner whose family affiliation would help your family improve their social and economic standing in the Roman world.
  2. The marriage would be arranged, the marriage would happen, and then you would basically figure out your life together from there. This was the normal social convention. And I think it is important to stress this so you don't try to import our own ideas about marriage and engagement into this text. People didn't typically get married in pursuit of love and the goodness of life. They got married because that's what you do...they got married because everyone else was doing it...and that is how you please your parents and help your families social standing.
2. And It's in this context that Paul says now concerning the betrothed...in other words...concerning the people who are engaged on the basis of a relationship organized by parents, where dowry has been exchanged, and the goal of the union was mostly economic and social...to those people...he says I have no command from the Lord.
3. Now when Paul says I have no command from the Lord, he does not mean I have no counsel from God on this matter. He means the same thing he meant earlier in the letter...I have no teaching directly from the mouth of Jesus. It's what scholars call DOMINICAL sayings.
  1. In the early church, before the NT was written down...the teachings of Jesus were communicated orally from the apostles to the church. And what's important to recognize here is that even before the Word was written down...the Word's of Christ were considered authoritative. It's Paul's assumption in this text that if you have a question about life...the first thing you should do is ask...did the Lord have any commands concerning this. God's Word was authoritative in the life of the church prior to them being written down.
4. IN any case let's look at Paul's input to them as an apostle, who speaks with authority from God...even when He does not have a command directly from the mouth of Christ.
  1. So you have most likely fathers of young betrothed women...and young men who are betrothed asking Paul...what should we do? Should we go through with this betrothal or should we shut it down? Should I stay with this guy or with this girl or should I cut this

off...given that I now belong to Jesus. Now look closely at this with me because Paul gives you a ton of helpful input here....

5. First he says I have no command from the Lord...so the very first thing he does, is look to the Word of God for counsel. In this particular situation of betrothal...the Lord Jesus never gave a specific command. But this is Paul's first and primary impulse when thinking through how to counsel someone in a relationship decision. Does the bible say anything about the kind of person you should try to marry? Either by way of command or wisdom?
  1. The answer is: Yes it does. And you should take that stuff really seriously when considering whether or not you want to pursue someone in marriage young man...or if you are being pursued young woman.
  2. For instance...I remember being a young believer...single...with no clue what I was doing or what I was supposed to be looking for in a spouse. And I had an older godly man say, brother if you want to know what you should be looking for you should read Proverbs 31. And the reason is, Proverbs 31 describes the ideal wife in Israel. At my old church in Fresno they called her the P31 woman.
  3. And so I poured over that text trying to figure out what every part of it meant...and I discovered two things that really affected me. The first was in verse 30 when it says... Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. I had never heard someone say that character matters more than physical appearance. It's not that physical appearance doesn't matter its just that it wont last forever like character will. That was the first time I had ever seriously considered that.
  4. I'm going to grow old with this person and the charm of their beauty is going to fade with time and what I will be primarily left with is their character...and I should seriously consider that when I'm pursuing a bride.
  5. The other thing I saw there that really affected me was what her husband is like. It says in proverbs 31:23 that Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. In other words, he is a man of good reputation who takes responsibility for his town and is a man of honor...an elder in the gate. And what struck me about it was how the whole thing is framed. P31 is about a godly wise woman of Israel...and in the description Solomon is like and oh yeah this is what her husband is like...honorable, responsible...godly.
  6. He isn't saying...young man this is the kind of woman you should marry...he is saying young man if you want to marry a woman like this...be this kind of man. This kind of woman doesn't settle for anything less than this kind of man, because she herself is wise and righteous. So my first point is you should make relationships decisions on the basis of any and all biblical input you can find.
6. The second thing Paul does here is to preface his input on the basis of who God made him to be...he says I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgement as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.
  1. And so what Paul is explaining here is that even though Jesus never taught on this...I have been uniquely commissioned and sent by God to speak on His behalf in a trustworthy way. And we will see in some texts in the coming weeks that what he means by that is I am speaking with a unique authority...he is going to tell us at the end of

- chapter 14...that prophecy within the church is valid or invalid on the basis of whether or not it is consistent with his teaching...which is a pretty significant claim.
2. But what Paul says here is really fascinating. People are established as ministers to the church by the mercy of God. Paul was appointed as apostle, and a trustworthy steward of truth...not because he was smarter and more self-disciplined than you...but because of God's mercy. Paul was just as inclined to sin I think as you and I are...but God by His mercy kept Paul faithful.
  3. There are many people in this church that you and I would consider trustworthy. Not to the same degree as Paul...they aren't going to give you infallible input...but they will give you good input that's worthy of your trust because it has been shaped for years by the word of God and prayer...and they are a gift to all of us...from the overflow God's mercy.
  4. So here is thought number 2 on how to make godly relationship decisions in Christ... seek the judgement of someone who is trustworthy. When you are in the middle of a decision about whether to marry or not marry, whether to date or not date...it has been my studied observation...that it's hard to become objective in the middle of it.
  5. I have seen godly young people pursue terrible relationships despite wise and trustworthy counsel to their own detriment. Listen to me...seek trustworthy counsel. There are a lot of godly older people in this church that will help you think objectively about those kinds of decisions...and if proverbs teaches us anything it's that wise people seek wise counsel and foolish people think they don't need any wise counsel.
  6. If you are afraid to reach out to someone you don't know...reach out to me or to one of the other elders or staff pastors. We are not too busy to talk with you about how God's word and God's wisdom are applied to life. That is literally why God put us here.
  7. So making godly relationship decisions includes looking to the word...looking to trustworthy counsel...and now I'm going to speed way up...it takes account of your context.
7. Paul says as someone who is trustworthy...my thought is I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is.
  8. When Paul talks about the present distress there is some debate over whether he is referring to a famine that had overwhelmed Corinth at the time of the writing of this letter or whether he is looking ahead somehow to the end of days.
    1. I think it's easier to just go with the simpler idea of the "present" problem of the famine. Without a doubt he is going to use this as an opportunity to roll into questions of eternity, but I think he begins by saying in light of the present famine caused by the flooding along the Nile...it's better to remain as you are.
    2. In this particular context...where food is scarce and hope is dim...you have a gospel to preach that can give hope to the hopeless and comfort to the dying. We will see next week that Paul is concerned about freeing people up for undivided devotion to the Lord in this present context...there aren't always going to be famines and misfortunes that awaken a hunger and thirst for hope and comfort in the eternal...so while it is here capitalize on it I think is the point.

3. But here is the important point to consider. You should consider the context you are in when making significant life choices about marriage and family. Paul does that in this text. Don't just get married because you can. Don't just have children because you can. Think about your context. Think about whether or not this is best considering the present circumstances and the unique opportunities you have been afforded by God for the gospel.
4. Jeanine and I got married before I started grad-school. Part of the thinking was...it's not practical to try and be long distance...it's not helpful to try and live a dating life-style while doing graduate studies. We know we love each other...we have seen one another's love for God...let's just get married. Is it okay to consider the context of your circumstances when you are thinking yes or no? Yes it absolutely is. And finally, when making relationships decisions you should consider God's commands, pursue trustworthy counsel, consider your life context and finally...
9. Be willing to follow the data where it leads...even into singleness. Paul says all things considered remain as you are. He says to those betrothed in this Roman context...given the present distress it's better to remain single. It's important parents...to understand that your bible says that. It's important young people that the Word of God says that sometimes it's better for a person to remain single.
  1. In other words...you shouldn't just take for granted that everyone should get married. Some people in some cases should remain single. I have very dear brother pastor who shepherds out in the central valley, who felt a long time ago that God wanted him to remain single. And God has given him the gift of self-control in order to do that.
  2. But people ask him constantly if he is dating or going to get married. And it concerns me that we just sort of take for granted that people should get married if they are single... like that is the next step forward in life for every single person.
  3. Paul's word's are right here before our eyes saying: for some people in some contexts, you should NOT get married. Not because it would be a sin to do it...but because the way God has gifted you...and in light of the times we are in...you would be more useful and fruitful for the kingdom of God in singleness.
  4. And what I'm responding to is this general sense of ruling out in advance that singleness might be an option for people in this church. Don't rule out in advance...that God might call you to singleness. I'm not saying be single I'm saying...trust the Lord...seek godly counsel, consider your context and be willing to honestly and objectively follow the data wherever it leads. So this is Paul's extremely practical input for making relationship decisions in Christ. Let me start moving a little faster here.

### **How to process all decisions in light of the times**

Paul moves on to apply this principle of remaining as you are. He says in verse 27 "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife."

1. What he means here is if you are already married...stay married. Glorify God in your marriage. Don't look for a way out if you can help it...that isn't glorifying to God.

2. Alternatively...if you are betrothed and you aren't married yet, I think you should stay as you are. But then he immediately qualifies this in verse 28 "But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned."
3. This is really important to understand here. He says I think if you are engaged...the better thing to do in light of the circumstances is to break it off and stay single for the glory of God. On the other hand...if you choose to go through with it...you aren't sinning. Why? Because marriage is a good thing, not a bad thing. It's not wrong to get married, just like it's not right to stay single. Both have their advantages and disadvantages and one may be preferable over the other given the context but at the end of the day this is about wisdom...not sin.
  1. It is really important to understand the difference between wisdom and sin. Have you ever met someone who makes decisions in ways that are really really really really different than the way you make decisions?
  2. And you see them doing things in their life and you either say...man you are stressing out waaaaay to much about this...or you look at them and think why are you not putting way way more thought into this?
  3. There is a difference between wisdom and sin. It is important not to confuse an area of wisdom with an area of sin and vice versa. People can disagree on areas of wisdom and we need to live with one another in patient and understanding ways...though the same is not true with areas of sin.
  4. So Paul says...I think it is best to remain as you are but if you get married you haven't sinned.
4. Then he explains his input back in verse 28: "Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that." So here is the other side of that coin. We can't confuse areas of wisdom and areas of sin within the church. People are free to make mistakes in their life and at one level it's important that they do because that is typically how people learn.
5. But if you make a foolish decision, you will live with the ramifications of that decision, no matter how much you want to blame others. IF you don't consider wisdom, you will almost certainly have worldly troubles.
  1. Listen to me young people. Especially if you are high school age. I want to say something to you as your pastor.
  2. When your parents say I want you to do this thing you don't want to do...instead of that other thing that YOU really want to do...they are almost always trying to spare you from worldly troubles.
  3. I remember when I was playing football in high school, and I ripped my rotator cuff the week before the big game with our arch-nemesis...my senior year. And I remember my dad saying...if you play you're going to make that worse. You should sit out.
  4. And I remember thinking...there is NO WAY I could ever do that...this football game is the most important thing that has ever happened or will ever happen on planet earth sitting out is not possible. Sorry dad. And he was like okay?
  5. And so I played...and made it 100 times worse. And even after orthoscopic surgery to try and reconstruct my shredded labrum...my shoulder has never been the same. My dad was trying to spare me from worldly trouble...but I didn't listen...and I will spend the rest of my life living with the consequences.

6. Point of the story...you should listen to your parents. They typically (not always) but they typically have your best long term interest in mind in a way that you probably aren't really prepared to fully appreciate yet.
7. And for the rest of us...sometimes wise and trustworthy people will exhort us in ways that we don't like or agree with...and I think it's important to realize that often times they aren't just trying to help us grow in Christ...they are trying to spare us from worldly troubles.
8. But bringing things back to the context of Paul's letter, Paul isn't concerned with Josh's labrum simply because it's going to be uncomfortable for the rest of my life...he is concerned with my labrum insofar as it affects my ability to serve Christ and live for his glory. Here is the foundation of Paul's admonition to remain as you are.
  1. Does considering the context of your decisions matter? Yes. Are you sinning if you disagree with me in matters of wisdom? NO. But here is what I have been trying to drive at are you ready? Verse 29
6. [29] This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short.
  1. This text is easy to misunderstand so let me unpack this for a minute. What Paul literally says in greek is "the time or the age...compressed...is". The adjective for compressed is a divine passive meaning it is take for granted that God has done something...God has taken the age and compressed it.
  2. And so the idea is probably not that the age has gotten chronologically shorter...it's that the nature of the time has become more significant. Here is what I mean...from the beginning of the world until the coming of Christ...God's people waited for the coming of God's redemption and the renewal of the world. But it came in stages...first there was Noah, then there Abraham...then there was Judah, then there was Israel...then there David...and the plan of redemption continued unfolding and unfolding and unfolding and when Christ Jesus finally came into the world to save sinners...he took on flesh and dwelled among us as the only begotten son of God.
  3. After He was crucified, buried and raised on the third day...it became clear that after all that waiting...and all that watching...we are at the last step of redemptive history...the next thing to happen is the return of Christ...the end of days...and the judgement of all creatures.
  4. And because the end of the ages has come upon us...because we live in the final age before the end...time is at a premium. The value of the time has become condensed. The time is compressed is not a statement of duration but of quality.
  5. And because that is what is fundamentally at issue here...Paul has some very strong statements to make about how we ought to engage with the world and our lives Final point
  6. We are called to walk with God on the threshold of eternity...

We are called to walk with God on the threshold of eternity...

1. So everything Paul said about wise relationship decisions is true...everything he has said about recognizing the difference between wisdom and sin is true...but let me just snap you out of any notion that that means you can just go on with your life with business as usual.

2. And he is going to do that by using a series of strong hyperbolic statements. He says first FROM NOW ON...let those who have wives live as though they had none.” And I think Paul stated that way specifically SO you would stop and do a double take. WHAT? Live as though they had none!?!
  1. Now I’ll be honest this text gave me some trouble this week. Specifically because Paul just told us to do the EXACT opposite in 7:1-5. He said if you are married don’t try to act like your single. Be intimate with each other. But here he says...if you are married act like your single. So what might be going on here.
  2. Well what I’m sure isn’t going on here is a contradiction within the word. Paul has laid out one consistent unit of thought here and I don’t think he forgot what he just wrote five seconds ago. Additionally, he is going to go on to say in verses 32 and 33 that single guys only worry about pleasing God...but married guys have to worry about pleasing God AND their wives...so he goes on to take for granted that if you get married you will live like you have a wife.
  3. So what I think Paul is doing here is trying to get us to pursue the KIND OF MARRIAGE that isn’t marked by what he called worldly things in verse 33. And he is doing this in the context of arranged marriages, that exist for economic advantage and the improvement of social standing.
  4. And I think he overstates the point for affect. Don’t live like you have a normal marriage because the time is at a premium. Don’t waste your time arguing about the color of the curtains...don’t burn these precious moments living for the things of the world like every other married couple you know in the Roman world...live for the glory of Christ because he says in verse 31 because the present form of this world is passing away.
3. What does that mean? It means that King Jesus is coming back to lay claim to his earthly throne. And the presence of his dominion is already begun in the his people the church. But when he comes something very significant is going to happen...all creatures great and small will be brought before him. The grave and the sea will give up their dead and everyone in this room, man, woman and...every creature who lives has lived or will live will be brought before the throne of God for judgment.
  1. When our name is called we will be brought forward and the books will be opened. And everything we have ever done...every thought, every deed, every cruel intention, every evil act will be laid before the burning gaze of a holy God.
  2. Our hearts will be opened and laid bare before Him...and you will see as all will see the inescapable truth that you are not only guilty...you are far more guilty than you ever let yourself believe...you are far more worthy of judgement than you have formerly considered...and you will be utterly without hope...and there will be no case offered in defense of the accused...where will you go...what will you do? What mountain will you hide under...what rocks can conceal you from the gaze of the Almighty?
  3. There will only be one hope...one help...one place to go in the day of judgement and that will be to flee to the refuge under the blood of the Son of God...
  4. If you wait until you get there it will be too late...your only hope is to flee to him today...to flee to Him now...to plead with Him to change you and make Himself yours and if you will go, Jesus Himself promises...that whoever comes to me I will never cast

out. If you will not flee to Him today than you will perish without mercy...but if you will, you will meet a God full of mercy and grace that knows neither limit nor bound! Don't look to your own unworthiness...look to the worth of Jesus Christ, the slaughtered lamb, slain to save sinners...a group to which every person in this room belongs.

4. Now in light of that...says Paul...live in your marriage. Don't invest your heart and soul in the color of the curtains...or whatever the thing is that you are taking super seriously right now...invest your heart and soul into one another holiness and preparation to stand before God at the end of days.
  1. And what's amazing is...that doesn't mean don't enjoy marriage. It means ground your joy in marriage in the love of God and in your union with Jesus Christ! That's where true happiness and holiness lies.
  2. When you think about the world this way you wont mourn like the world mourns. Alvis' Tucks' funeral. Even in the saddest situations...keep up a holy joy in God in the midst of sorrows.
  3. When you think about the world this way, you won't celebrate the way the world celebrates. When the Eagles won the super bowl...the whole city shut down. Is it okay to be happy? Yeah... but that victory march for the Eagles is a tiny little shadow of the joy that God has promised those who serve well as good and faithful servants.
  4. when you think about the world this way you won't be super fixated on stuff. Don't let your stuff own you...everything you have is on temporary loan...good and bad. Whether you are rich or poor...
    1. Little poor girl who worked as a servant in a rich neighborhood.
5. Those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it...all of us have to go to the store...pay taxes and other things that are part of the world that is passing away...we are not to let anything in this age consume us like our pursuit of the glory of God.
6. And the reason is...all of these things are going to come to an end. My marriage is going to come to an end. Marriage points to something greater...I love my wife but our marriage is a picture of God's love for us...in the age to come I will love jeanine more not less...same with you
7. But here is the point...you are living on the brink of eternity...does wisdom matter? Yes. Is it important to think carefully about who you marry? Sure! But all things are part of the world that is passing away...what will endure forever is the glory of God and the love of God's people for their Lord. This plane wont stay in the air forever...so pay attention to what you hear

## **COMMUNION:**