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July 7th: Ruth 2 & 1 Corinthians 7

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Ruth among the reapers. The form of this world is passing away—be content in your position.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Ruth, chapter 2. Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, after him in whose sight I shall find favour. And she said to her, Go, my daughter.

So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you.

And they answered, The Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this? And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves

after the reapers.

So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest. Then Boaz said to Ruth, Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field, or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them.

Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, Why have I found favour in your eyes that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner? But Boaz answered her, All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land, and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Then she said, I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me, and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants. And at mealtime Boaz said to her, Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine. So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain, and she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.

When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her, and also pull out some from the bundles for her, and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her. So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an effer of barley, and she took it up and went into the city.

Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, she also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her, Where did you glean to-day? and where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, The man's name with whom I work to-day is Boaz.

And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, May he be blessed of the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. Naomi also said to her, The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers. And Ruth the Moabite said, Besides, he said to me, you shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.

And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted. So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests, and she lived with her mother-in-law. Ruth chapter 2 is set at the beginning of the barley harvest, and the text begins by introducing us to a relative of Elimelech, a member of the same

clan or family.

A man of some substance or mighty worth, he is possibly a man of wealth, or maybe a man of standing within the community. Later on we see that he is someone of great virtue. A related expression is used of Ruth in chapter 3 verse 11, which might suggest that character is particularly in view here.

This man is called Boaz, and because of their similar character and virtue, Boaz and Ruth are clearly well suited for each other. As we see, they are both people who are characterised by great kindness. Ruth and Naomi do not seem to have a family to support them.

They have come back to Bethlehem, they don't seem to have property there anymore, and there is no immediate family to take care of them. So Ruth asks for permission to glean. We're reminded that she is Ruth the Moabite at this point.

She is both a widow and a foreigner. In Leviticus chapter 23 verse 22 we read the instructions for gleaning. Ruth hopes to find favour in someone's sight.

Presumably she can go to different fields and ask for permission to glean there, with different field owners providing for different gleaners. We read that she happened to come across the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of a Limelecks clan. There's no mention of any of the other people in the area.

There is no explicit instructional planning, it seems to be by chance. Like in Esther chapter 6, when the king reads the records of the kingdom when he can't sleep, and comes across the account of Mordecai's revelation of the conspiracy, it seems to be merely a chance occurrence. Providence is hidden and inscrutable, and God's hand is behind all of these events, as we will see, but as they occur they seem to happen by chance.

Boaz blesses his reapers and the reapers respond in kind. They seem to be people who fear the Lord. At this time in Israel's history this could not be counted or presumed upon.

Back in the story of Genesis, when Abraham and Isaac were sojourners in foreign lands, they had to take care whether the people were God-fearing or not. If they were not God-fearing, they would act in exploitative ways and abuse the people under their care. Boaz seems to be faithful in this regard though.

Boaz asks concerning Ruth, and the foreman tells him who she is and about her request to Glean. She is the Moabite woman who has returned with Naomi. She doesn't belong to anyone, she's an outsider, and the foreman describes her as a diligent worker.

Boaz then speaks to Ruth, asking her to Glean in his field only. He wants to provide for her in a more committed way, and he addresses her as daughter. She is no longer

treated as an outsider, but as one who has been provided for and cared for, by someone who is treating her as if she belonged.

Boaz tells Ruth that he has instructed his workers not to touch her. Some see this as an instruction not to assault her. While Ruth's vulnerability to assault may be seen in verse 22, here I think the meaning is probably that she not be pushed away or denied access to the field and its Gleanings in any way.

Boaz also gives her special privileges. He allows her to drink from the water that he has drawn for his workers. Ruth expresses her gratitude and wonders why he has taken such notice of her, as she is just a stranger and a foreigner.

He has shown this kindness to her on account of her kindness to Naomi. The word of her behaviour to Naomi had obviously gotten around. And Boaz describes what Ruth has done in a way that alludes to the call of Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 verse 1. Now the Lord said to Abraham, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

She has sought to come under the wings of the Lord. This is language of protection, but it is also language of marriage. In the next chapter she will ask Boaz to spread his wings over her.

And Boaz blesses her, going beyond the requirement of the law. He includes her in the meal for the reapers. She eats until she is full.

Naomi's emptiness in the preceding chapter contrasts with the fullness of Ruth here. Boaz also instructs the young men to allow her to glean among the sheaves and to make things as easy for her as possible, purposefully pulling out barley from the bundles and dropping it for her to pick up. Ruth ends up reaping an ephor of barley and she brings back an ephor of barley and the remainder of her meal to Naomi.

It's not entirely clear how much an ephor was, but they gathered an omer of manna in a day, which was a tenth of an ephor, so this might be enough for several days. Gathering like this over the period of the harvest would give Naomi and Ruth enough grain to live on for the rest of the year. She tells Naomi in response to Naomi's request that the man who took notice of her was Boaz.

And Naomi's response is interesting. May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead. At the end of the preceding chapter she spoke of her bitterness.

She said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? Now, however, she is speaking about being blessed by the Lord, and the

kindness of the Lord.

What does Naomi mean that the kindness of the Lord has not forsaken the dead? The Lord is caring for the house of Malon and Elimelech through caring for Ruth and Naomi. He is showing his compassion for the widow, a common theme within the Pentateuch. Boaz is a kinsman.

He is one who could redeem and deliver them and provide for them. This is important knowledge for Naomi. She now realizes that there is one who could provide for them in some way, and who is willing to do so to some degree.

The kindness of Ruth and the kindness of Boaz are also signs of the Lord's grace to the widowed and bereaved Naomi. Naomi instructs Ruth to stick close to Boaz and his female workers. Boaz had told Ruth to go along with his male workers, but Naomi suggests that it would be preferable for her to go with the female workers, and not to go into any other field lest she be assaulted.

Boaz will provide for and protect Ruth in his field. And she spends the entire period between the barley and the wheat harvest working in Boaz's field. This is more or less the period between the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Pentecost, those seven weeks.

Boaz could probably have done more. He seems very eager to assist Ruth and Naomi, but the problem is that if he redeems Elimelech's land, he has to take Naomi as his sole wife, and she is past childbearing age, and this would have the effect of destroying his own inheritance, as he has no children of his own. So Boaz seems to be doing what he can within the limits that he faces.

Recognizing this will help us to understand what comes next. As Christians reading this story, we should also keep in mind throughout that this is not the last Redeemer that will arise from Bethlehem. A question to consider, what lessons might we draw from this chapter about God's providence in our lives? 1 Corinthians chapter 7 2 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

3 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 4 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

5 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this, I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. 6 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am, but if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn

with passion. 7 To the married I give this charge, not I but the Lord.

8 The wife should not separate from her husband, but if she does, she should remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband, and the husband should not divorce his wife. 9 To the rest I say, I not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. 10 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

11 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. 12 Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 13 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so.

In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. 14 For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? 15 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.

This is my rule in all the churches. 16 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. 17 Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

18 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. 19 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. 20 Were you a bond-servant when called? Do not be concerned about it.

21 But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bond-servant is a freedman of the Lord. 23 Likewise he who is free when called is a bond-servant of Christ.

24 You were bought with a price. Do not become bond-servants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

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. I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free.

Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 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. 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, 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, 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. I want you to be free from anxieties.

The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit.

But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes, let them marry, it is no sin.

But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is, and I think that I too have the Spirit of God. In chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, Paul seems to be responding to some specific questions from the Corinthians. The claim of the opening verse, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman, is not Paul's own claim, rather it seems to be a quotation from the Corinthians letter to Paul.

Throughout this chapter, and at various other points in the letter, we have to guess at the position of the Corinthians, or the positions that they were inquiring about, through a sort of shadow reading of the text, inferring from Paul's arguments what the arguments of his opponents or interlocutors were. In a situation with so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband, Paul is writing into the Corinthian context, where they are sitting rather easy to gross sexual sin in their midst. Paul is not arguing, however, that marriage is merely for the sake of avoiding sexual immorality, rather that a situation like that in Corinth is one where marriage makes even more sense.

If we read between the lines of Paul's argument, it might seem that his opponents have a sort of spirituality that both denies the body, and ends up indulging the body. In their super-spirituality they think themselves above the body, and so things associated with the bodily passions, such as sexual relations, might need to be avoided. However, if sexual relations are engaged in, it's no big deal, it's just a matter of the body.

While it would be more desirable to give oneself to asceticism, if you cannot do that, it merely inconveniences your spirituality, it doesn't imperil it. We might think of Paul's teaching in Colossians chapter 2, verses 20-23 here. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, referring to things that all perish as they are used.

According to human precepts and teachings, these have indeed an appearance of wisdom, in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. A religion that is supposedly above the body and seeks to deny its appetites, but which also, in its downplaying of the importance of the body, doesn't take the sins of the body very seriously, is wide open to all sorts of problems and abuses. The alternative to this is a society of marital faithfulness over against a society of widespread sexual immorality.

The Corinthians, like many in the early church and in that society, seem to have had strange views about sex and how it relates to supposed spiritual persons. Sex can be seen as something bodily, to be denigrated. Paul's point is not that marriage is something lesser, a mere concession to the flesh.

However, his concern is to avoid sexual immorality and to advocate for faithful and sexually active monogamy, or celibacy, as the licit alternatives. And there's an element of realism in Paul's counsel here. People have often claimed an elevated spiritual character exempts them from the temptations and dangers surrounding sexual behaviour and relations.

Again and again we discover that it doesn't, and that responsible limits and practices guard us from temptation and are necessary and wise. We should not, like the Corinthians, think that we reign like kings and are above the temptations of Satan. Rather, we should be humble and wise to his ways, guarding and arming ourselves against his stratagems.

Both spouses in a marriage should give the other their conjugal rights. One of the problems at Corinth might be a sort of asceticism in which couples are denying each other sexual relations, and as a result of such denial, improper sexual relations are occurring. Paul argues that neither the husband nor the wife have authority over their own bodies.

This is not a claim that the spouses' bodies are entirely the possession of the other, but that neither has exclusive rights over their own bodies, but has a duty lovingly to render their bodies to the other, and should not deprive the other for lengthy periods of time, save by mutual agreement. Paul is saying this as a concession, not a command. He isn't instructing married couples to refrain from sexual intimacy for periods of time.

He's merely presenting this as an option. Paul himself is celibate, and if you asked his personal preference, it would be that all were like him. However, what really matters is God's action, not Paul's personal perspective, and God has given different people different situations and different callings.

Paul speaks to the unmarried and the widows. He tells them that it's good for them to remain single. The point isn't that it is the only good thing to do, but rather that the urgency of marriage or remarriage need not be felt.

If a man's wife has died, for instance, there's no necessity that he remarry again. There's no urgency to that. Paul himself is single and is contentedly remaining in that state.

It is likely that Paul himself was a widower, or perhaps his wife left him when he became a Christian. When such a thing happens, we need not desire to change everything about our position. We can remain in our current position.

The point is not that the single must remain single, but rather that it is not necessary for them to enter into the state of marriage. The New Testament treats the unmarried state as one that Christians can purposefully pursue, and one that in certain instances is even preferable, as the unmarried person can devote themselves more fully to the service of the Kingdom of God. One of the things that this does is to disrupt the cultural script of marriage as a matter of course, the expectation that everyone should get married.

Marriage ceases to be something that we just do because it is what everyone is expected to do, and it becomes something that we need to think about as a particular Christian vocation, a vocation among other vocations. Viewing marriage primarily as one possible mode of Christian discipleship, rather than as the presumed script that everyone must follow, is really important. If marriage is just the necessary following of a cultural script, we lose the ability to see Christian marriage as a form of vocation, and a similar sense about the various vocations that exist for the unmarried is lost.

There are too many people who think that since they are unmarried, they have somehow forfeited God's plan for their lives, that God's purpose for everyone is to happily pair them off with another partner. Yet Paul wants the readers of this letter to understand that, with regard to God's calling, there is no urgency to leave the unmarried state. However, if the unmarried cannot control their passions, they should marry, rather than have those passions burning in more dangerous ways.

Paul then turns to speak to married couples. Divorce or separation must be avoided if at all possible. Where divorce does occur, the person should seek to remain single, or should seek reconciliation with their alienated spouse.

And Paul bases this on the commandment of the Lord. He is likely referring to Jesus' teaching on the subject in the book of Matthew or Mark. Jesus himself has spoken

directly to that issue, and Paul relays Jesus' teaching to the Corinthians.

He goes on to deal with further categories of persons, for instance, Christians with unbelieving partners. In those situations, they should not seek divorce when the partner consents to remain. Now, you can imagine after the preceding chapter, there is a question that arises here.

Wouldn't having a relationship with an unbelieving spouse pollute the body of Christ, along the lines discussed in chapter 6? No, Paul argues. The unbelieving partner is sanctified by their continued willing union with the Christian spouse. And the same is true of their children, who have been separated from the pagan world by their association with their Christian parent.

In such a marriage, a Christian wife or husband may exert a considerable influence upon their unbelieving spouse. When reading this chapter, it is really important to recognise the way that, in the words of Anthony Thistleton, Paul deals with the good, the possible, the just, the feasible, the constructive, the useful, and the right. Paul is very sensitive to matters of circumstance and situation and the contingent issues of people's lives.

There is a very careful interplay between pastoral and ethical concerns in Paul's teaching. Most of the teaching in this chapter does not come as absolute commandment, but in form of wise counsel, in the form of preferred courses of action in different situations and other things like that. Even when things go wrong, or people do not act as they should do, the grace of God remains for them still and can be known in their circumstances, even the most difficult.

Paul's teaching about calling here and different situations helps us to realise that God's grace can take root in our lives wherever we find ourselves. Paul draws back from the specific case of marriage at this point to explore the broader principle. People should live in the life that God has placed them in and not always seek for alternative situations.

We all find ourselves in constrained situations, but our freedom to obey God is not compromised or undermined by this. And he is challenging a sort of over-realised eschatology, which would present escape from certain conditions as necessary for the realisation of our spirituality. The slave, for instance, cannot be a Christian in the condition of slavery.

He must become free. For such an approach, the person who is married to the unbelieving spouse would be imprisoned by that fact and denied the possibility to live a proper Christian life. But yet Paul teaches quite otherwise.

The reality of God's call can come to us in whatever situation we find ourselves, even ones that are far from ideal. And this saves us from having to fret about the situations and the conditions we find ourselves in, without denying the power of the Gospel to

transform the actual lives that we are living. He gives the example of circumcision and uncircumcision.

The condition is not the point. What matters is living faithfully, keeping the commandments of God. He then turns to slave and free.

He deals with a situation not clear in the ESV's translation, where there is a future possibility of freedom. In such a situation, use your current condition of slavery for Christ. Don't allow your hope or yearning for a more ideal future situation to deprive you of the possibility of serving God where you are right now.

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't take the opportunity if it arises. But do not allow your service of God to become contingent upon the possibility of that eventuality occurring. The calling to faithfulness comes to us in our current situations and circumstances, where we are right now.

There is a vast difference, of course, between slave and free in the present age. However, viewed from the perspective of the age to come, which has been inaugurated in Christ, the master is no longer over the slave, and the slave is no longer under the master. And the slave is called to live in terms of that fact right now, to stand in a different relationship to his continuing condition of service.

This doesn't mean that there are not discriminations to be made. We have been bought by Christ, so we do not enslave ourselves to men. If we can, at all costs, we avoid giving ourselves into the condition of slavery, and we should seek to abolish slavery where we can.

The enslaved person has been bought by Christ and is his freed person, and free people should not enslave themselves to men. Paul now speaks to those who are not yet married. And in his teaching here, it's important to recognise the difference between what Anthony Thistleton has called a theology of eschatological imminence and a chronology of eschatological imminence.

While the latter operates in terms of a conviction that the absolute end of the cosmos is only months or years away, the former necessitates no such belief. Rather, the theology of eschatological imminence that we encounter in the New Testament arises chiefly from the combination of the apocalyptic judgment of the cross and the inauguration of the new creation in the resurrection. The new life of the age to come has already been inaugurated, it's already starting to take effect.

Life after these events is characterised by a radical relativisation of the current world order, an intensified sense of its penultimacy. From now on, all human history occurs beneath the shadow of God's eschatological kingdom, which is already at work in our midst. Our understanding of the true character of the nearness of the end things should

not be allowed to be compromised by our modern reduction of all time to clock time.

Others have drawn a distinction between what has been called participant logic and observer logic, and these are two different perspectives from which we may speak of the end of the world. In the case of observer logic, the end of the world would refer to the final end of the material and the intersubjective cosmos. But in the case of participant logic, the end of the world can refer to the catastrophic collapse of the established state of a particular society or a person's historical existence.

The destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in AD 70 would have represented just such an event for many early Jewish Christians. In declaring in verse 29 that the appointed time has been shortened, Paul may refer to the way in which the cross and resurrection has brought the end things near to us in history. We now exist in a sort of providential window of opportunity.

This has been graciously held open by God for us, and this should heighten our sense of present urgency, our sense of the theological imminence of the eschaton, and of the penultimacy of the existing social and political order, and the fact that it is passing away that can be elevated by specific historical threats or instabilities. These things can wean us off our investment in the world. Some commentators have suggested that the Corinthians that Paul addressed within this letter were facing just such a situation, maybe something provoked by famine or severe persecution.

And in such a period of social ferment, the proximity of the end things is acutely felt. We feel the shadow of eternity looming over the crumbling social order. That doesn't mean that the actual last day has arrived, but we do find ourselves caught in its gravity.

In this context, Paul's concern seems to be less with preparing the Corinthians for the end of all things, than with sparing them from the greater pressures and worries that would afflict those whose embeddedness in the collapsing order was exacerbated by marriage or by their many possessions. It is within this context that Paul advances an ethic for life in the shadow of the last things. As the external structures of this world are slipping away, we must learn to occupy the world as those who are not pre-occupied with it.

We engage with the world, but we do not tie ourselves to it. We may or may not feel the slipping away of the external structures of our present world as keenly as Paul's original addressees might have, but their transience and penultimacy remains a fact of considerable importance. To some degree or other, all of us are invested in the current order of our world, in its political structures, in its economic and social institutions.

Unfortunately, not only do we occupy these existing structures, we are all too often pre-occupied with them, dull to any sense of their impermanence in the face of God's inaugurated and coming kingdom. While the collapse of these structures may not be as

near at hand as the destruction of Jerusalem was for the first Christians, it is no less certain. The present form of our national and international politics, for instance, is passing away.

Like the nations and empires before them, our prevailing political powers and certainties will one day pass away, perhaps altogether beyond memory. Paul never argues for a complete detachment and disengagement from the world. We still are those who deal with the world, we buy and sell, we mourn and rejoice, but our participation in these activities is now tempered by Paul's radical as-though.

No longer are these activities permitted to be the pre-occupations that they once were, to be the defining features or the determinative realities of our existence. Rather, we now undertake these activities as people who belong to the eschatological kingdom of Christ that is coming to dawn in the world. Our existence is determined by the reality of Christ's kingdom, not the passing structures of this age.

We have been unplugged from the immediacy of our social reality, and we now engage with it as those who are no longer bound to it and identified by it. Paul's concern in all of this is to free the Corinthians from undue anxiety. While it is perfectly possible to serve the Lord in varied circumstances, it is difficult when we find ourselves pulled in different directions.

Paul isn't commanding the Corinthians or suggesting that single people are better than married people. Rather, he's revealing the inherent challenges of some callings, and how certain callings may afford us certain freedoms over others. The woman whose husband dies is free to remarry another Christian.

While it is possible to be faithful in a relationship with a non-Christian spouse, it is not appropriate to enter into such a state as a Christian. A question to consider, what are some Christian practices that help us to sustain the attitudes to our circumstances and vocations that Paul identifies here?