

# The Christian is Marked by Eternity

by Mack Tomlinson

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**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 7:29, 2 Peter 3:7, Romans 8:17, 1 John 2:15, Colossians 3:1

**Topics:** "Eternal Perspective", "Heavenly Citizenship"

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## Description

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## Transcript

When you and I come to die, we're leaving all that's earthly, intransitory, and temporal behind us. You might be on your deathbed, and you have to say goodbye to your mate, or your children, or your parents. You're leaving this world.

That's when your heart better be free. No holding on. No regrets.

Free to go into eternity. We apologize for the poor audio quality. It is corrected two minutes and 30 seconds into the sermon.

1 Corinthians 7. I want to speak on the subject that the Christian is marked by eternity. The Christian is marked by eternity. I told Jessie, I think it was last night, if I were to put a longer title on this, the way that Puritans used to do it, it'd be a whole paragraph, but I chose a longer one, which is, live loosely to your earthly existence.

Live loosely to your earthly existence, because you are marked by eternity. 1 Corinthians 7, we'll begin reading in verses, verse 29, and we'll read through 31. 1 Corinthians 7, 29 through 31.

I'm reading from the ESV. This is what I mean by this. The appointed time has grown very short.

From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none. 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 or live in this world as though they had no dealings with for or because the present form of this world is passing away. The Christian is marked by eternity.

Now, Peter says in 2 Peter 3 that Paul wrote some things that were hard to be understood. Do I need to wait to get on this bus stop? I don't need to wait. Peter in 2 Peter 3 says that Paul accuses Paul, and rightly so, of saying things that were what? Hard to understand.

Well, so did Peter, by the way. When you read 1 Peter, 2 Peter, he was guilty of it too. But Peter was right.

This passage in 1 Corinthians 7 is difficult to understand because it's like this rhetoric of contradictions. Jeff, live like you don't have a wife. Really? But as you begin to follow Paul's topics and arguments in 1 Corinthians, miscellaneous topics, he's going from one to another, addressing them pastorally, correctively.

So let's remind ourselves of what he said up to chapter 7. Chapters 1 through 4, what's he doing? In essence, he's having to defend his apostleship all the way through to chapter 4. Chapter 5, he's dealing with what? Immorality, not in the world, but in the church. And also in chapter 6, he comes back to it, that in chapter 5, immorality in the church and church discipline. Chapter 6, Christians suing one another, not being willing, even though they could have done it, to settle disagreements within the church, going to the world, suing one another before the world.

And Paul hits some broadside with this. It's like he says, are you really that stupid? Don't you have wise enough people among you to settle your disputes without suing one another? And then you come to chapter 7. What do you have all through chapter 7? Marriage, singleness, divorce, separation, unbelievers married to believers, widows. Paul's giving directive principles of conduct in these real life situations.

Marriage, singleness, divorce, separation, widows. And the advantage of remaining single in light of verse 9, which we didn't read, he addresses what he calls the present distress. Now, scholars, commentators, they don't really know what he's talking about.

There's conjecture, probably increasing persecution. It was becoming more and more difficult for the gospel to go forth, for churches to function. So, increased persecution, possibly.

But from chapter 1 down to verse 28, look at 28. He's addressing all these kind of things. But then, the end of verse 28, it's kind of like he steps back, lays his pen down, and he's going to shift gears.

He's going to completely go to another thought that seems disconnected to what he said. And for three verses, he's going to express something which seems strange, illogical, contradictory. And then in verse 32, he goes back to the topics he's been addressing.

So, what's going on here? For three verses in what Paul says to the Corinthians. On the surface, verses 29-31 seem to have nothing to do with divorce, lawsuits, should I marry, should I not, marriage problems. Why? Verses 29-31.

We know the verse numbers weren't in there. So, you have this pause, this changing the subject, sandwiched in the middle. Why? Why is Paul saying what's going on here? Because on the surface reading, it's puzzling at best.

It's confusing. There's no obvious logical connection. In fact, there's things you read and you say, he can't literally mean that.

Things hard to be understood, Paul. And he doesn't even unpack it. He doesn't even exegete it.

He doesn't even explain himself. Like when Jesus turned and said, remember Lot's wife. Boom! He goes on to the next subject.

Paul doesn't explain himself. He doesn't open this up. He wants it to settle in on them, to impact them in the context of their daily living.

People are getting divorced. Marriages are separating. People suing one another.

Single people. What should I do? Living life, in other words. So, he says in verse 29, this first phrase, look at it with me.

Let's unpack this and just see what's in Paul's heart here. He starts verse 29, this is what I mean, brothers. Or other translations, but this I say, brothers.

What's he doing there? Well, he's not referring to what he's been talking about by saying, I've spoken about this and this is what I mean. No, he's pointing forward to the importance and urgency of what he's fixing to say. Like, listen to what I'm fixing to say to you.

Here's the deal. This is what I want you to really get. Gather up the lungs of your mind and follow with me.

Think about what I'm saying. Here's where I'm taking you. Here's what I want you to understand.

Here's what I want you to see and realize about marriage, singleness, lawsuits, relationships, the present distress, living life, the greatest sorrows, the greatest joys, the greatest distresses, living your life in this world. Here is the real deal. And then he starts telling them, verse 29, look at it.

But this I say, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short. What does he mean? Is he saying the end of the world is here, Jesus is coming? No. Is he saying you're all going to die soon? No.

He's not talking about them all being right near death, kind of the way James is. Life is a vapor, here and gone. No.

The wording is different. The phrasing is, time has been compacted together. It's as if it's an act of God.

In redemptive history, in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. And so, Hebrews says, at the end of time, at the end of the ages, God sent His Son. So, Paul's saying God has compacted the time, He's shortened time in relation to this world because of the Kingdom of God.

Now, I don't know all that that means, but it really means something. The time is short. We think about time, Jesse and I were talking about this this morning.

We think about time as if God wound up a clock or He set a timer in creation and it's running and He's set an alarm and it'll go off. We shouldn't view time that way. Time, God can stop time, He can shorten time.

I mean, in the Old Testament, time was shortened, days were shortened. And so, God is not limited by time, He controls time. Whatever Paul means by the time is shortened, it means there's been a

compression, a shortening act of God because time and history are not wound up like a clock.

God is doing something in relation to redemption. Do we realize, really, often enough, that what's happening internationally and in the nations and wars and all the things related to life and providence in history, God is doing one thing and the world doesn't see it or know it or believe it. God is working all things after the counsel of His own will to bring about His redemptive purposes, to gather in the elect, to take the gospel to all nations, and then Jesus said, what, the end shall come.

So, verse 29, if this is true, brethren, this I say, the time is shortened. And then He says, from now on, from now on, Francis Schaeffer, how shall we then live? From now on, what does He say? Well, He does the most amazing thing. In 29-31, He mentions five things.

Five things. Marriage, sorrows, joys, possessions and business, and living in this world, relating to living here below. In other words, all your life, you deal with the world, you live in the world.

We're not to be of it, but we're always in it, always functioning. You got to go to Walmart, you got to buy groceries, got to go to your job. You live in and deal with the world, right? Paul takes these five pictures that pertain to all of life.

Think about it. Nothing in your life, in your life, in this world, is left out of verses 29-31. Marriage, your family, relationships, the greatest sorrows you ever experienced, the greatest, highest joys you ever experienced, scattered throughout life, what you own and what you do in life, and living in this world, and having to relate to it.

Everything about you and I is in those three verses, those five things. Now, what's Paul doing here? He's using illogical rhetoric. He's not telling the Corinthians, you're not to keep doing these things, no.

These are really five, if you will, illogical absurdities and contradictions to get their attention, to change their perspective, earthly perspective on how they view life and all those things, to have a perspective that's marked not by time, but by eternity. I mean, have you ever heard anyone at a wedding, the preacher preach to the bride and groom, young man, he who is married, let him live as though he's not. You don't hear that.

I mean, you wouldn't ever hear anyone say to parents who are weeping at the grave of their 20-year-old who died tragically, listen, live like you're not grieving. You wouldn't hear anyone say to a couple with a newborn healthy baby, listen, be as though right now as if you have no joy. They'd look at you like you're a fool.

You wouldn't hear anyone say about owning things and buying and selling, live as if you own nothing. Live as if you possess absolutely nothing. And you wouldn't hear anyone say, hey, all your life while you're living here, act as if you're not living here.

But that's exactly what Paul says in these three verses. If you just read it, he says exactly that. Let me just read it again quickly.

Let those who have wives live as though they had none. Let those who mourn live like they're not mourning. Let those who are rejoicing be as if they're never rejoicing.

Let those who buy be as though they have no goods. And let those who are dealing with the world, living in the world, be as if they're not living in this world. How do you apply that? Well, it is difficult, but let's think about this.

Paul is saying in the context of all those issues in chapter 5, 6, 7, and on and 8 and 9, he's saying, brethren, this present life should not be marked by the earthly reality. This present life is marked by something higher, greater, that's eternal. And think about that.

The Christian's life, it already is marked by eternity. We're already living in the kingdom. We're already experiencing eternal realities.

The future is already here. For instance, the New Testament tells us now we're the sons of God. Right now we possess eternal life.

We have passed from death to life, right? It's a reality, it's a done deal. Now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Now we're the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be.

People talk about heaven and what it's going to be like and what we're going to be like. John says, we don't even know. It has not yet appeared what we shall be.

So the books on heaven, be careful what you buy, lest you waste your money. John says, we don't even know what we will be. Now we're the sons of God, and it will appear what we shall be.

But now, Paul said, right now you are heirs of God, and what? Join heirs with Jesus Christ. Now our life is hidden with Christ in God. Now, Romans 8 says in past tense, we're already glorified.

We're seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Our lives are already marked by eternity. This present life is to be dominated, Paul is saying, by an eternal perspective.

Everything in your life, first and foremost, is not being a husband or a wife or a businessman or a mother or living in this world a citizen of Maine or wherever you live. Everything in your life is not marked by those things. It's marked by you're a Christian.

That's what life is marked by. The present life is dominated and marked by eternity, and that should shape and control the present. Our past is not to shape and control the present.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 6 and see Paul does this with the Corinthians identity. There was no place more vile and pagan than Corinth. And in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says in verse 9, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? The Corinthian believers knew that.

They knew that, and he's reminding them. Do not be deceived. Neither the sexual immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy.

Greedy people are going to perish in hell equally with homosexuals. Nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you.

That's what some of you were. Those things, we were that way. That's what we were.

That's what we practiced. That's the way sinners have lived. And such were some of you.

But, here's your new identity. You were washed. You were regenerated by the Spirit of God and given a new heart.

And that's signified in baptism. Baptism represents all that. And Paul here, probably, when he talked about you were washed, those Corinthians would have had their baptism in mind.

That symbol, that ordinance, typified to the world, preached a sermon to the world, that I've been washed in the blood of the Lamb. You were washed. You were sanctified.

That is, God came and intervened and interrupted your life, and He set you apart for Himself. First in eternity, then in time. He grabbed you out of your vileness and your darkness when you were a member of the kingdom of darkness.

And He set you apart for Himself as a chosen vessel. You were washed. You were sanctified.

Then He says, you were justified. Declared righteous. The very righteousness of God imputed to your account.

Right standing with God. Declared righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. So here Paul is wanting them to see that their life is not marked by what they were, but what they are now.

The great transaction, the great transformation. Do you, brothers and sisters, especially if you had a sordid past, do you see yourself in light still of who you were or who you are now and what you are now? Is your perspective about your life marked by the past or is it marked by eternity? The great reality here is, it's not that you're married. It's not that you're a businessman.

It's not that you've been through the deepest sorrows or have the greatest joys and experiences. It's not that you live in the world. The greatest reality is who you are and where you're going.

Now let's just camp out on these a little bit, briefly. He says, first of all, in that list, let those who have wives live as though they had none. What's to mark a Christian man or a Christian woman? What's to be the predominant driving force in their life? Not marriage.

Marriage is not to be the primary dominant thing in their life. Being a believer is the predominant thing in their life. Marriage is an earthly, temporal, domestic relationship, but it will not be in heaven.

And so marriage is temporal and it's to be controlled by kingdom perspectives. No single man who's a believer and is radically in love with Jesus Christ should stop loving Christ and become less radical in his love for Christ when he marries a woman. Undivided devotion should continue.

Now, so you add that relationship in your life as a Christian, and your marriage now is to be marked, not just by time, but in eternity. Brother Jesse lived three years with an unconverted wife who despised it and rejected it, and God in mercy, three years later, saved her. And then they were joint heirs together of the grace of life.

So, if you're married, you've got to have a kingdom perspective. Let the one who's married live spiritually as if the kingdom of God is predominant and most important. There's no license being given here by the Apostle Paul to neglect your marriage, or to neglect your wife and not include her.

Because, as one brother said, the will of God in one area won't contradict and make you neglect the will of God in another area. The godliest men will love their wives deeply and include them, and spend time with them, and nurture them, and date them, and the wife will feel treasured. And all the time, that brother can be living for the kingdom as if it's everything.

Let those who are married be as though they have none. What's the next thing? Let those who mourn be as though they're not mourning. My wife and I, our first child died after she was born.

That could dominate a Christian's life and put you into bitterness, and doubting God, and being angry. The deepest sorrows in life can make you bitter. But when you have the deepest sorrows, you're to have a perspective that God reigns.

He's over this. He's with me. This is not going to last.

I'm going to have the heart and the perspective that these sorrows are temporal and they're not going to last. Let those who sorrow ultimately see themselves as they're not ones that are going to be sorrowing for long. That's really what he means, and the reverse is true.

Those who have the highest joys, a baby's born, a new marriage, a phenomenal opportunity, great experiences with the Lord, joy unspeakable, full of glory, deep assurance, God's deeply working in your life. The greatest joys, step back, keep perspective. Don't depend on those joys.

Don't think they're always going to last. Don't get addicted to them. Don't live on experience.

Live for eternity as if you didn't need the joys. Let those who rejoice live as though they're not, as though they don't have to rejoice. Can you walk with God when you have no joy? The Bible's not all about joy.

The Bible's about Jesus Christ. So how do you do with your eternal perspective about your life when you have the deepest sorrows, when you have the deepest joys? Truth unchanged, unchanging. You're marked by eternity, not by the highs and lows of the Christian life or the highs and lows of this earthly life.

Change will come. I talked to a mom recently. This wasn't my wife, by the way, so this isn't a hidden message.

A very faithful, loving, connected mother. And she's facing letting go of this last baby who's probably 25. And the heartstrings, it's tough to sever them because a woman's life is often, their children are their life.

Brethren, that is not right nor true. Ladies, your children cannot be your life. These little polished arrows that we polish and prepare to be, they're supposed to be shot, not kept in the quiver.

All motherhood, all parenting is temporal. It's going to end. Your life is not to be dominated or controlled by parenting.

Or the next thing goes into, let him who buys as though he has nothing. A businessman, your possessions. I know, I've seen houses and I have friends that have these marvelous heirlooms of antique furniture that they were given.

Great-grandfather had them. Grandmother had them. Parents gave them to them.

And their house is filled with really cool antique stuff. Furniture, chests. Could you give it up and go to India as a missionary? Could you give it away? You know what it's for? It's a future eschatological bonfire.

It's all going to be burned up. It's all kindling for God's great bonfire. It's all going to be gone.

Everything you own, everything you have, everything, every place you've ever lived, it's going to be gone. We'll carry nothing into eternity. Does earth possessions mark us and control us? Or are our hearts free because the kingdom nominates? Not what we own or not what we do.

The last thing he says here, verse 31, those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. We're in it. You've got to deal with the world.

Tim and Ruby and the children have to go back to San Antonio. It's a pretty big, dark city. Jesse and I have to go back to Dallas-Fort Worth.

Pretty big, dark areas. Some of you may live in darker places. The fact is, we've got to deal with the world.

How do we deal with the world? By not being of it. To live as if we're leaving soon. To live as if it has no control on us.

To be free of it. For your heart and your mind to be free of dealing with this world while you are dealing with this world. Does it have its claws in us? Does it have its clutches around us? Does it have its tentacles connected to us? Or the world in some way has got us? What did John say? Well, Paul says, first of all, verse 31, for the present form of this world is passing away.

Why should we have this eternal perspective on marriage and family and life's joys and life's sorrows and buying and possessing and working and living here? Why have an eternal perspective that none of that is really what we're about primarily? Because it's all passing away. Every bit of it. When you and I come to die, we're leaving all that's earthly, intransitory and temporal behind us.

You might be on your deathbed and you have to say goodbye to your mate or your children or your parents. You're leaving this world. That's when your heart better be free.

No holding on. No regrets. Free to go into eternity.

This world in its present form, Paul says, the reason to have this eternal perspective that's marked by eternity and not by time and not by what life's all about, the reason to have that is because when you're facing a divorce or a separation or a lawsuit or relational problems and issues that are always weighing you down, bogging you down, distracting you, you've got to step back and say, I'm a Christian. God's with me. This is all going to pass.

I'm going to get through it. And it's all going to be gone. And at the end of life, where you lived, whether you were married or not, what you did, how much you possess, won't matter a hell of beans.

Not even one bean. It won't matter one bean. When you leave this world, you're going to leave it as a Christian heading into eternity.

Therefore, our life now ought to be marked by eternity and not by this world. That's what Paul's saying to these Corinthians. I want you to look at 2 Peter 3. I've referred to it earlier.

2 Peter 3, Peter calls these saints to this perspective when he says this in verse 7 and following, But by the same word, the heavens and earth now exist. The heavens and the earth are stored up for fire. God's big bonfire.

It's a big one. What's going to be in the bonfire? Everything in heaven, everything on the earth. Pretty big, pretty big pile.

A universal, cosmic, divine bonfire. Being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the day, with the Lord, one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years is one day.

Whether the Lord comes tomorrow or a thousand years from now is immaterial. What's important is right now eternal perspective. The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, verse 10, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar. Can you imagine being an unbeliever in that day, in that moment? The heavens will pass away with a roar. You know, when a fire truck drives by me, and it's really going loud, I mean, it's so loud you cover your ears.

The heavens and earth are going to pass away with a roar. And the heavenly bodies, that is, all the elements in the universe, will be burned up and dissolved. And the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed or burned up.

Verse 11, since all these things are thus to be dissolved, here's perspective. This, I say then, brethren, is Peter's way. What sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness? Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

But according to His promise, we are waiting for a new heavens and a new earth in which dwells righteousness. Perspective. That's the end of this world.

So why love it? Why hang on to it? Earthly mindedness about marriage and singleness and jobs and possessions and relationships, earthly mindedness is damaging. It's hindering, it's controlling, it voids our usefulness. That's why Paul is telling the Corinthians, brethren, in the midst of all these things you're going through, these squabbles and this carnality and the confusion about what's God's will, should I marry, should I not, this present distress, earthly mindedness about life voids our usefulness.

And that's what Paul doesn't want to happen. He wants the Corinthians to cultivate and have heavenly mindedness, a perspective about eternity, living in the light of eternity. Temporal mindedness.

Doesn't it still try to dominate at times? It does, if we're honest. How do we see everything? How much does temporal mindedness control you? Our past and our present tries with all its might to dominate us. Living loosely connected to this earthly existence.

Are you, brethren, Are you living loosely in your earthly existence? Because you are marked by eternity, you're marked for eternity. Nate used this phrase yesterday, this age in which we're currently living. That was a phrase he used in his sermon.

This age, this present world, this world in its present form, this age, and it's us upon whom the end of the ages has come. This age in which we're currently living must not control us. Because we're in it from the womb to the tomb.

Whether you're here today in your 10 or your 70, it doesn't matter. You are marked by eternity. You've been saved.

We've been saved for eternal realities. We've been saved out of the world to live as an eternal light in this world. So as you travel through this world and out of it soon, then, then all that's temporal and earthly will be non-existent and gone.

And the only thing that will matter in heaven is Christ and the Kingdom. And the ultimate goal, look at verse 35 in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul gets to the ultimate goal, we didn't read it, but he tells us what the ultimate goal is for this life. It's found in verse 35.

I'm sorry, I'm in the wrong book. 35, see the phrase, undivided devotion. Undivided devotion.

That's the goal. He wants all that they face and live in not to rob them of devotion to Christ. Whether you're single, whether you're married, whether you're a businessman, whether you're an evangelist, whether you're a young person, nothing in life, the greatest things, the best things, the hardest things, the deepest experiences are not to take our rivalry to them away from Christ.

Do we live in increasingly undivided devotion to Christ? Life doesn't have to produce divided or lesser love for Christ. Marriage doesn't have to produce less love for Christ. Work doesn't.

Sorrows and joys don't. Using and living in this world doesn't have to make you less devoted and less loving to Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, we are marked by eternity.

Time and the earthly relationships we have and the deepest experiences of living here 20, 50, 80 years, the time's been shortened. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none. You're not marked by marriage, you're marked by eternity.

So live with undivided devotion. Let those who mourn live as though they don't mourn. You're not marked by the worst sorrows, you're marked by eternity.

Let those who greatly rejoice and love life and see good days be as though they rejoice not. You're not marked and dominated by your joys and highs and lows. Let those who buy live as though they own nothing.

Stuff, brethren, gathers dust. It accumulates. Possessions aren't to mark your life.

Eternity is to mark your life. Let those who deal with the world be as though they're not dealing with it. Taxes, houses, jobs, cars, and the cares of life dealing with living in this world, you're not marked by this life.

You're marked already by eternity. And John says, do not love this world. He's not talking just about worldliness, he's talking about this earthly, temporal life.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, for all that is in the world is passing away along with its desires. But the one who is doing the will of God abides forever. Brethren, I urge you as you go

home to cry out to God to root out of you an earthly perspective, because ultimately you're not a businessman or a student or a husband or a wife or a child or an evangelist or a pastor or anything earthly.

You're not a citizen of this world. You're a Christian. You're a citizen of heaven.

You're an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. Live like it, because you're marked by it. Let's pray.

Father, seal every word You've said to us in this conference from Thursday to this moment. Seal Your truth in our hearts. Don't let the seed be sown.

We've scattered the seed. Lord, seal it in our hearts that fruit would spring up and grow, that fruit would be born, that we would grow in prayer, that we would grow as a part of a church, that we would grow as pastors and as sheep and how we relate to a church and our own elders, that we would grow in prayer. We would grow in evangelism.

And that we would grow from an earthly perspective to an eternal perspective. That we would see our lives, Lord, in the midst of everything in life, that we are Christians, that we're sons of God, that are marked by eternity. Lord, help us.

We bless You for bringing us here. We're thankful for the privilege. Thank You for the fellowship.

Thank You for the kindness. Lord, You've only brought us here to strengthen us and equip us to go forth to the battle. So, Lord, now as we sing one final song, seal it in our hearts and send us forth with joy and reality.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

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