1 Corinthians 7:29-31 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

As I looked at this text and tried to grasp what it said I went back to my training at the Seminary. There are a few basic rules that need to be followed when interpreting the Bible, that is, when you are trying to determine what the Bible is saying. The first rule is: “Let Scripture interpret Scripture.” What that means is that every passage has to be understood in the light of all the Bible has to say. If your interpretation of a passage is found to disagree with any other passage, then note that your understanding is wrong.

The second rule of interpreting the Bible is this: “Never take a passage out of context!” What this means is you can’t and don’t take a passage alone, or a few words from a passage alone, in order to prove a point. A passage needs to be considered in the light of what surrounds it, by who it was written to and why, and by the sense the words themselves convey in light of rule number one. If you are wondering if “day” means day in Genesis, you go to what was meant in the day it was written and what the very context of the verses are. That’s what true Biblical scholarship is about.

You might be wondering why I should mention the rules of interpreting the Bible? Yep, it is the text before us. It is a tough one and it needs to be understood properly. If we didn’t have the sense to use the rules I mentioned, all sorts of misunderstanding could come of this text. For instance, just take the first piece of advice that is found in our text. Without the rules of interpretation, I could then take that text and say, “Husbands, you no longer have to take care of your wives. God says you can go out and do what you like, after all, Paul, the inspired writer tells us: **“Those who have wives should live as if they had none.”** Of course, you and I know that such is definitely not what Paul is saying to us, that it is not the understanding that this text is trying conveying to us!

So what is the understanding of our text? I’ll grant you this is not an easy text at first glance, but we will get to the heart of the matter. Our theme for will be: THE CHRISTIAN GRASP OF THE WORLD.

To begin, the first thing we need to do is grasp the context. Understanding the context and background of the words here helps tremendously because I believe that God does not write obscure things that we cannot grasp. What has happened here, is that the context and the nuance of the words as the Corinthians understood them are difficult today because the times and language have changed. I believe the Corinthians clearly and readily grasped what is said here, and with help from one another began to live and practice these very words. So context and background is important.

It is rather obvious that Paul, under verbal inspiration, is writing to the church at Corinth. The Corinthian Church had some problems, as is so evident as you read this 1st. Epistle to the Corinthians. There was division in the congregation based on personalities, especially the personalities of the pastors who served them. There was a case of incest that the congregation refused to deal with. There were even situations where members of the congregation got into frivolous lawsuits against one another. Oh, and then there were other situations of outright sexual immorality. But to the credit of the congregation, they sought out the guidance of the Lord. We believe they sent a letter to Paul seeking God’s direction and will for them and their lives. And evidently one of the big concerns was with the estate of marriage.

Please note that it is in chapter 7 that Paul begins to answer their questions on marriage. Paul speak about whether to marry or not. He speaks of widows and divorce. He even speaks of virgins and what is proper there. What is most interesting is verse 28 which says, **“But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.”** It is after all of that that we find the verses before us.

Please note our verses start by saying: **“What I mean brothers, is that the time is short.”** Now by these words many feel that Paul was apparently expecting Christ Jesus to return very soon and end the world. I suppose that could be true, but I don’t think so. Such an understanding would be inconsistent with other writings of the Scripture where we are told things that must yet take place before Jesus does return. Things like the rise and exposure of the Anti-Christ and a whole period where the Gospel will be obscured, or that the gospel would be preached in all the world. I think Paul was given too much knowledge from the Lord to think Jesus was coming soon. You see, I think Paul explains his words in verse 31, **“For this world in its present form is passing away.”**

With these words Paul is pointing out the fact that the world, society as they knew and experienced it, was going to change. Things like the peace found in the Roman Empire and the tolerance that the Romans had for the Christian faith were soon to change. If this letter was written in 54 or 55 a.d. please note it would only be about another 3 years before persecution under Nero would begin and by 66 a.d. the whole city of Jerusalem was under siege and in 70 a.d. Jerusalem and the Temple of the Jews would be totally destroyed. From that point on Christianity was under constant persecution and would be for perhaps the next 300 years!!

So put all of that together. Earlier in chapter 7 Paul spoke of **“the present crisis”** (26). Following our text he says, **“I would like you to be free from concern.”** The very context indicates that Paul is speaking of the remaining time that was left before Christianity began to undergo harsh and persistent persecutions. It is literally between these two sentences of our text that Paul gives out the advice before us. For each piece of advice there are other passages that bear out what Paul is saying. And I believe it is said the way it is: a. to avoid panic and despair; b. that these words might also serve as guidance for you and I today. Guidance that I think is sorely needed.

With all of that, lets then wrestle with the meaning of what is said. **“From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of this world as if not engrossed in them.”**

Please note that these words are not a license for a husband to abandon his family for that would be totally contrary to many other passages in Scripture. The message Paul is giving is the same message that Jesus had for the busy Martha, who complained that Mary was just sitting around. Martha had become too wrapped up in hustling around the kitchen. Jesus said, “**Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”** (Lk 10:41). It is the same lesson Jesus taught when he said, **“Anyone who love his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me…whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** (Mt 10:37-39)**.**

Again, put it all together. What did Jesus say in Mtt. 6:25-34? I won’t read you the whole section but highlight it. **“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear…For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well…Every day has enough troubles of its own.”**

Let me just throw a few more passages at you. **2 Corinthians 10:3-5** For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. **1 Timothy 6:10-11** For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Here is another. Pay attention!! **James 4:4-10** You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? 6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. And one last one to sew this up. **1 John 2:15-17** Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world-- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Do we fail to grasp the lesson here? That is an important question to ask. Our focus in not to be the world and the ways of the world! And yet, look at us! We often do exactly what these words warn of! We make the world and what is going on here the end all and be all! We treasure family over God. We lust, desire and do where God says “No!” We are even a country divided on the basis of “Should the law be obeyed or not?” We are wrapped up in our things: what we have, what we want, what we can get, and how can we get it? All of this because we do not take this lesson deeply to heart.

You can have that family but have it with the Lord at your side. When God is number 1 and everything else is number 2, the world is better for you. God wants to be a part of your family, not a part from your family! So let me make a few observations of our silliness toward God, yes our being wrapped up in the world.

We will drive hours to be at the ball games, the events of our children because we believe “family time, sharing together” is so important! But we won’t get up and go to church on a Sunday morning even though that family time, that God relationship found there is more important than anything else!

In our grief or mourning, in how we think of and consider those we have loved and lost, all too often it is hard to tell the difference between the Christian and the unbeliever of the world. I understand loss and grief. But people, we have the promise of the Lord for eternal life and salvation! We have the promise of God in Jesus that our loved ones are with him and that by faith we too one day will spend eternity with them. We have the knowledge of heaven and the perfection of Jesus’ kingdom given, promised, and assured in the resurrection of Jesus! Yet all too often, with the loss of a loved one, we drag their memory around like some sort of anchor to our lives. I know so many Christians who drag their losses around instead of rejoicing in the victory and marvel of God for that person and for us. Don’t we believe that God only does what is for good! Good for the one we lost and good for us too! Don’t we trust and believe the Lord and his victory!

We are wrapped up in our cars, houses, possessions, clothes, makeup, white teeth, and crepe skin! Seriously, is that our focus and our life, or is it to be Jesus and the awesome and eternal gift of life and salvation He has given us? Why do we make such silly things of this world so important? I believe God’s Words here are the plea for balance, good and godly balance in regard to this world. That balance can only be carried out when God and his promises are our foundation and fortress! When the light and love of Jesus is our guide, hope and comfort in everything.

Dear people, God is telling us through Paul and the rest of his Scriptures: “Hey, get your heart in the right place. Get your heart on God and his promises. Get your life centered on Jesus and his awesome blessings in everything and in every way! We are total victors over the horrors of this world because of Jesus and his love. Live that! Believe that! Stand on that! In this way our mourning is joy, our happiness is genuine, and our things are Gods! Here is the heart of this lesson, to have Jesus and his promises first and foremost in our hearts. Amen.