

Text: 1 Corinthians 7:25-35

Title: Good Advice for Unmarried People

Truth: Why should we be content?

Date/Location: Sunday July 12, 2020 at FBC

Introduction, v. 25

In the prior verses Paul reviewed directives about marriage from the Lord Jesus (7:10-11), and disclosed new instructions as part of his apostolic ministry (7:12-24). In verses 25-35, similar to verse 12, the apostle does not have a commandment from the Lord. But he does have mature, trustworthy Christian judgment of the situation for those who have never been married. The Lord has, in mercy, made Paul trustworthy as a guide in such important spiritual matters.

This is what I hope I can do as a pastor. If there is a special situation that the Scriptures do not specifically address or about which only general principles are given, I hope to be able to give mature judgment as one who God has made trustworthy. Maybe you would aim for the kind of wisdom and judgment that would permit you to do the same.

What he writes here is also God-breathed, so this is God-inspired advice. But it concerns a matter where wisdom is required and different decisions may be implemented without sin, so it is different than a “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not.”

The apostle is writing now concerning the Corinthian question about virgins, that is, those who have never been married. These are normally young men and women who are in the church and wonder what they should do given the societal circumstances they face. Maybe they are even engaged (betrothed) to be married and wonder if they should follow through.

I. General Idea: It is Good to Remain as You Are, v. 26-27

This is an extension of 7:17-24 in which the apostle taught us to be content with the circumstances in which we were called to salvation.

- A. Married? You must stay that way, as taught in 7:1-16. “Do not seek to be loosed” can also refer to a betrothed (engaged) young couple who might be wondering if they should call off their wedding. Paul encourages them to keep their word and go through with their planned marriage.
1. If one spouse decided to break it off, then it is OFF. It is no more, as if it never happened.
 2. But, having already determined (we suppose) that you and your fiancé are outfitted for marriage, and you want each other, and have decided to pledge marriage to one another, then it is right to continue down that path.
- B. Are you unmarried/divorced/a virgin? It is good to stay that way. Remember, this does not mean “it is bad to be married.” It does not mean “celibacy is superior to marriage.” Marriage and singleness are “goods” in different ways. Each situation has its upsides and its downsides. Given the particular circumstances, Paul will say, the pros of singleness outweigh the cons.

II. Marriage is OK too, v. 28

- A. Paul says that if you are a virgin and marry, you are not sinning. This is true both for a man or a woman. Just realize that marriage entails its own troubles. Singleness has its challenges, but it is better to be happily single than miserably married! And if you are in a miserable situation of marriage, you are called to endure and make it better.
- B. No one can say that in every case celibacy is superior to marriage, because it depends on the individual and circumstances.
- C. In fact, the demand for celibacy is a sign of apostasy (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Marriage is in fact a good thing (Heb. 13:4) which was created in response to a not good circumstance (Gen. 2:18).

III. Why Is this True? Parts of verses 26, 28, and all of 29-35

The apostle has advised that it is good to stay in the state we find ourselves. Why is this? I see four reasons.

A. “Because of the present distress,” v. 26a. That is, the difficulty of the current situation in society. We do not know exactly what that situation is, but we can make an educated guess about *then*, and also think about *now*.

1. **Then.** The Roman empire would, in the near future, begin severely persecuting Christians. The initial persecutions were already underway, as we can see in Acts and 1 Thessalonians. Being free of a spouse and children would make it easier to evade persecutors, move as needed, and serve the Lord with a kind of flexibility necessary for the times. If heavy persecution were coming, there would only be limited time to freely minister the gospel to those who need it.
2. **Now.** Today, there is a severe difficulty in finding a good Christian spouse. Oh, there are plenty of “Christians.” But are they the ones who mean what they say when they make a promise to be married? Will they be diligent to keep pure? Will they forgive when wronged? Where are the young people who are well-raised—*and* who accept their upbringing? Where are those who were truly saved and want to live for the Lord?

Furthermore, in our own land, persecution looms in the future as troublemakers use the law and courts to crush believers and Christian-run businesses. If you were told in January that beginning mid-March you would have little to no outside human contact for a few months, would you have felt any more burdened to witness to that family member or neighbor while you had the chance? But even worse is what awaits the nations at some point, which we do not know.

Being married and having a family makes that far more complicated to endure. In other countries, this is already a reality. Dissidents including Christians are “disappeared” from society and probably are killed in communist countries.

B. Because of “trouble in the flesh,” v. 28b **Internally**, marriage too often brings out the worst in us, because husband and wife are two selfish sinners trying to get along together. We break out against our spouse in ways we might never imagine doing outside the home. That is true all the time, and perhaps in some cases

especially under heavy stress like it sounds they were undergoing in Corinth.

Externally, marriage (and children) can be the cause of difficulties if there is distress in society such as mentioned above. For example, if you are persecuted and your wife and children depend on you, how and where do you flee? Can you find work? How do you support them? If you “disappear” what will they do? If it is war-time and you are drafted, do you go ahead and get married right away, or do you wait?

C. Because “time is short,” v. 29-31. Specifically, because of coming persecution or other contemporary circumstances, time was short. But it is generally true also that time is short for all humans. We live a brief span, and then move to eternity. What happens here, enjoyable or disappointing as it may be, is not apples-to-apples comparable with what will be in the eternal state.

1. The last phrase of verse 31 is the explanation: “for the manner of life of this world is passing away.” This is why we are to have the kind of Christian outlook that we have. We hold relatively loosely the things in this life because they are temporal. Even our closest relationships and heartaches and joys and possessions and activities in this world are, in our minds, secondary to the things of God. They should not cloud our view of the eternally important things.
2. As a result, if you are married, soon enough you will not be married, so we should have a mindset that our marriage cannot negatively impact our service for God. This should help us to keep God’s values as preeminent in our minds. It is not that we unhitch or act unmarried; it is that we think of it in its place of lesser relative importance to our walk with the Lord. When *that* gets out of whack, that is, when we see marriage as the highest end and value, then we get our perspective skewed. Ironically, when you put marriage above God, then your marriage will actually decrease in happiness. When it is elevated to the place of an idol, then it is out of place and you cannot be blessed.
3. Similarly, if you sorrow now, remember that you will pass through the sorrow. It is passing away with the rest of the

world. Make the decision to subordinate your sorrow to living for the Lord. Sober-mindedly make up your mind that whether sorrow or happy, you will serve Christ. Watch how in that mindset Christ will comfort you.

4. And if you are happy now, in the long view it is not significant because it too is passing away. If you buy a possession now, you may be proud of it and thankful and enjoy it, but it is essentially as if you do not own it because you are simply a temporary steward of that thing. Those who live in this world as if they are staying here find out soon enough that they cannot do so forever because it is passing away.
5. Where verse 31 has “misusing” the world, I think there is a better translation. The word is very similar to the simple “use” or “make full use of.” The idea, as with all of these, is that the things that are done in this world are going to pass away and so a certain mindset about them should prevail, as if in a sense they *are* not.
6. The more heavenly minded you are, the more your relationships with people and the world look and feel differently to you. They don’t take on the weight and importance that they would if you were engrossed in the world and temporal values.
7. The form of this world is passing away. There will be a scene change like there is on the set of a school play.
8. **Application.** This concept is crucial for **hoarders** to get into their mind. It is time to get rid of stuff because you damage yourself by carrying the weight of that around your neck like an albatross. Things keep you from devotion and service to God. It is also important for those who are **perfectionists**, wanting to maintain their possessions perfect and get super upset if there is even a scratch. Things are passing away. This teaching is important for **those who grieve**—remember that joy comes in the morning! Grief is not forever and you cannot be ruled by it, because God rules your life. Those who **rejoice** must also temper that happiness with the realities of life. Those who are **super busy** with life’s activities and who enjoy in this world are

not forever and are not your highest aim. Too often they become that, however.

- D. Because it is good to be “without care” in serving the Lord, v. 32-35. First, do you see what lies behind what Paul is saying here? He elevates serving the Lord to the premium spot. It *is* everything to Paul. With that as a goal, you can see how Paul then organizes life’s activities, even things like marriage. Did you desire to serve the Lord more than you desired to get married when you were dating your spouse? Do you now desire to serve the Lord with that fervency? If you had to choose between the two things—marriage and serving Christ—what would you pick? Thankfully the Lord does not put us into that spot. But it is a good thought experiment...
1. When you are married, you have certain things you must do to care for your wife or husband. These things are not an anxiety to you, but they could become so if mis-prioritized. They are concerns to which you must devote time. Of necessity is time spent to please your spouse, which does cut into time to serve the Lord. Yet, this should not be read too harshly, because pleasing your spouse is pleasing to the Lord.
 2. When you are single, you can focus on serving Christ wholeheartedly without the distraction of having to please your spouse as well. You can focus on personal holiness. The only necessity in this case is to please the Lord. But there is only rarely a circumstance in which you would find yourself with *no other human beings* to be concerned about. You have co-workers, friends, parents, extended family, etc. with whom you must be concerned as well.
 3. Again, none of this says that marriage is bad, it is just different. It is necessary to propagate the human race to fill the earth, and to avoid temptation, and to provide companionship.
 4. Celibacy teaching arises out of an extreme interpretation of this passage. Certain people do willingly abstain from marriage to serve the Lord. If they are self-controlled, this works well. If they are not, then it turns out terribly. Celibacy for reason of serving the Lord is a good thing. But if the reasoning behind it is ascetic, then Paul would denounce it. An ascetic philosophy is one that

practices severe self-denial for purpose of advancing one's standing with God, or to pay for past sins. Asceticism has been a part of most religious traditions because of human nature—that it has a tendency toward works-based religion.

Conclusion

It is interesting how the apostle navigates this situation. Writing about this to a wide audience is tough. But he manages to give sound spiritual counsel about some complicated issues. He supports the idea of celibacy, but not for the wrong reasons (asceticism). He has some very practical counsel for the time in which he lived. And it applies to our time as well. He supports marriage as well. What exactly the advice would be for *you* depends on the present circumstances of society and your own spiritual maturity and giftedness.

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