

The Book of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Session 30: Should I Marry?

1 Corinthians 7:25 **Now concerning** virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.

Paul often distinguishes between subjects by use of the words “Now concerning.” The new subject is “virgins.” But when we keep reading, it makes some people think this may not be the subject matter at all. Let’s keep reading and I’ll show you what they are talking about.

1 Corinthians 7:26 I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, *I say*, that *it is* good for a man so to be.

In vs. 26, notice that phrase “the present distress.” Paul does not explain what that is, but this is generally thought to refer to the sufferings during the formation of the body of Christ. As this new faith was being spread, there was increasing persecutions. Therefore, his point is: in view of this persecution, it would be best to not marry under these extremely difficult circumstances. We will get to comment on this a little more when we get down to vs. 28.

1 Corinthians 7:27 Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife.

Do you see vs. 27 where it says “Art thou bound unto a wife?” Wait, didn’t Paul start in vs. 25 with “virgins?” So, which is it; virgins or married people? Did Paul switch subjects again in vs. 27? He did not, he is still talking about virgins. To understand how this is true, we have to understand the culture of first century Corinth.

First, let’s define “virgin.” The word for virgin literally means, “one set aside.” This is a reference to the fact that they have not had sexual relations. The word is used in the bible to apply to both women and men.

The custom at that time was that couples who were espoused (engaged) to each other, were referred to as “husband” and “wife.” Let me show you an example.

Matthew 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother **Mary was espoused to Joseph**, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹ Then Joseph **her husband**, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.²⁰ But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee **Mary thy wife**: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Paul is telling espoused virgins not to break their espousal, but if they already have, not to necessarily seek a wife. For those couples who decide to continue with the espousal and marriage, Paul tells them...

1 Corinthians 7:28 But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

This is in the context of vs. 26 which referred to “this present distress.” Now, in verse 28, Paul talks about if they marry anyway, they are not sinning, but they can have “trouble in the flesh.” In other words, there will be extra pressures on the marriage which need to be taken into account. The extra pressures would be those persecutions by Nero, as he plotted against believers in Jesus Christ.

In other words, if you rush into this marriage at this time of persecution, it may be that the husband may be dragged from the side of his wife to appear before magistrates and be required either to renounce Christ or die. And then what will become of her, especially if soon after they were married she is with child? This is the kind of “present distress” that Paul has in mind when he says that they don’t sin by going ahead with the marriage with all this persecution in view, but it could certainly make for “trouble in the flesh.” I don’t think this “trouble” is limited to the persecutions, but it is certainly a part of it.

1 Corinthians 7:29 But this I say, brethren, **the time *is* short**: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;

What does Paul mean when he says “the time is short.” Some commentators says that Paul expected the return of Christ at any moment, hence, “the time is short.” Paul may have expected the Lord’s return at any time, but I do not think this is what Paul has in mind when he writes vs. 29.

Paul didn’t say, “the time may be short,” he said “the time is short.” Christ did not return in Paul’s lifetime, and here we are over 1900 years later and Christ still hasn’t returned, so if that is what Paul meant, then he was wrong, the time wasn’t “short.” I don’t think Paul was guessing about the Lord’s return.

“The time is short” has to do with the persecutions and distresses being “at the door” so to speak. Nero was, at that time, already plotting the persecutions with which he would devastate the church. So Paul says that in view of the escalation of persecutions and the pressures it bring upon a marriage, it is okay to wait on getting married.

But then, what about those who are already married?

1 Corinthians 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short: it remaineth, that both **they that have wives be as though they had none**; ³⁰ And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; ³¹ And they that use this world, as not abusing *it*: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

When Paul says for married men to “be as though” they have no wife, he is not talking about treating their wives unkindly or neglecting them. He is not encouraging men to fail in the duties of love and fidelity. But they are not to suffer the attachment to their wives as something which would interfere with their service to God.

In a world of increasing persecution, they should live unto God and not allow their affections to their spouse to adversely affect their affection for God or interfere

with living for Him. In brief, a married man should be just as faithful, just as committed to God as he would be if he had no spouse or family of his own.

The sense of the entire passage is this: do not let some sorrow or tragedy in your life (they that weep) keep you from serving God. Don't dwell on your sorrows and get on with serving the Lord.

Will you let some pleasure (they that rejoice) in your life take the place of laboring as a son or daughter with God?

Will you let your business (they that buy) take the place of working for the Lord? Will you let your possessions become the focal point of your life? Will the getting of things be what stands between you and wholehearted service to God?

Married men ought to be just as faithful to God and just as pious in every respect as if they were unmarried. That's Paul's message.

1 Corinthians 7:31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

To "abuse" something is to over-use it. It is sometimes easy to live a life of excess to the detriment of the Lord's work. Therefore, Paul reminds us that these things are passing away.

1 Corinthians 7:32 But I would have you **without carefulness**. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord:

In other words, don't be "full of care" for the things of this world. In other words, don't let your marriage distract you from serving the Lord. But it doesn't have to be the case. Many married couples have great marriages and they serve God with their whole hearts. If a man is unmarried, he can concentrate 100% on things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please *his* wife.

Those who are married have a divine (God-given) responsibility to care for their spouse. Serving God is not an excuse to discharge that responsibility carelessly. But neither can we live for our spouse and children and not for God.

1 Corinthians 7:34 There is difference *also* between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please *her* husband. ³⁵ And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.

There are some people who can remain single and serve the Lord without distraction, but there are those which cannot. The thing Paul is after is for everyone to serve the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:36 But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.

The “any man” here is the father. I know this is not the usual way this verse is talked about, but I do not think that Paul is teaching that it is better if no one gets married. Yes, it is better from the standpoint of serving God without distraction, but it is just as possible to serve God with a spouse, and Paul can’t be thinking that ideally, no one should get married. That just doesn’t make sense, seeing that marriage is a divine institution.

So, I would like to propose the idea that we have misunderstood this passage. Again, the “any man” of vs. 36 is the virgin’s father. Her “pass the flower of her age” means that she is finally old enough to marry.

So, here is a father who has not allowed his daughter to marry. But, after considering her age and her desire to marry, he decides to allow the marriage to take place.

1 Corinthians 7:37 Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.

Sometimes a godly father will deny permission for his daughter to marry. Perhaps he sees something in her suitor that she does not see. Perhaps it is a matter of timing, and he is asking her to wait. Whatever the reason, he “standeth stedfast” and does not allow the marriage to take place.

The phrase “having no necessity” may have to do with pressure from the wife or daughter to allow the marriage, but more likely, it refers to the dowry paid to her family which often was a financial help to a poor family. But in this case, the father has “no necessity” and may decide not to allow the marriage.

“But hath power over his own will” refers to the fact that about 50% of the population were slaves in Roman times and many father did not have the right to decide if their daughters would marry. They did not have “power over their own will” as that was retained by the slave owner.

All of this should be taken in the context of a godly, loving father providing leadership out of love, not selfishness, pride or stubbornness.

1 Corinthians 7:38 So then he that giveth *her* in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth *her* not in marriage doeth better.

This is not the way marriage is done in this culture today, but the sense of this is that “let them marry” is the good thing, whereas “giving her away” against her will, is better served by “not giving her in marriage.”

Paul is now going to change the subject to address widows. Yes, he has already done that back in vv. 8-9, but they concern a different context.

1 Corinthians 7:39 The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

In a nutshell, a widow can remarry if she wants to. Two things to notice here:

- 1) The phrase “whom she will” negates the idea that God has picked the person we are to marry.

- 2) The only restriction is “only in the Lord.” That is to say, the person she picks needs to be a fellow believer. Paul is adamant about not being unequally yoked with unbelievers.