

“To Marry or not to Marry – That is Not the Question”

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

In this last section where Paul is still dealing with marriage, the question that Paul was asked appears to be, ‘Now that I’m a Christian, should I get married or not?’ Often the question people want to know is ‘Is it the Lord’s will that I should marry this person?’ Is he Mr. Right, is she Miss right? While Paul doesn’t address the latter question, he does address the former. And his answer is really, ‘You’re asking the wrong question.’ His answers to that question will guide the unmarried to the kind of people they should look for in marriage.

In addressing ‘virgins’ we see that Paul addresses both men and women who are of age to wed but are still single. No discussion about that at all; it’s assumed.

In the Corinthian context here, these relatively new believers have been asking Paul questions like ‘Now that I’m a believer in Christ should I ...’ And these questions are to be commended. How does being a believer in Jesus Christ change the way I live? Last week we talked about how it affects our marriages, social settings, and work. A summary of life in general. But now he addresses primarily those who are younger and who are not married yet. Should we get married, Paul?

In Paul’s answers, he wants them to think about how being married affects your relationship with the Lord. That’s the real question. It’s not just Should I get married but if you’re a Christian and if you get married and if you have kids, have you thought through the spiritual implications of what that means living in a culture that is not friendly towards God and Jesus? Paul answers back essentially saying,

Are You Willing to Bear the Responsibility of Raising a Christian Family Knowing that They Will Experience Trials? **(7:25-28)**

Because if we’re honest, most of us would probably say, I can handle being persecuted but Lord, I don’t want to see my kids or my wife suffer. We want our kids and grandkids to be safe. We even pray that no harm will come to them. But we also pray for their salvation and spiritual growth. Well, if you’ve been saved for a while you know that eventually harm and trials will come to the Christian life. Listen to what he writes:

²⁵ Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. ²⁷ Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

Remember, Paul is single, so he commends this life only if you have the gift of God to remain single and use your life fully to live for Him. He even said back in 7:7

⁷ I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Paul commends singleness only if one feels God has led him in that direction and they are content to find satisfaction and joy in God alone. That continues to be his theme in all these discussions about being married or not; pleasing the Lord as a single or as married.

Again, Paul speaks by the Spirit since Jesus never addressed this. He gives a healthy warning about marriage because of the 'present crisis' or impending crisis. What did he mean by that? Most scholars feel from history that he was not referring to any major persecution they were under; that would come in about 10 years. But in the general context, he knows this is a reality since he says in v.29 that the time is short and the world is passing away. Along with the general stresses that marriage brings (v.28 But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.) and knowing that we live post-resurrection, we also know that Jesus is coming back someday. Paul is just reminding his listeners and readers of these basic things that the Christian needs to know; marriage and kids bring stress into your life; the world is not for you and the world is perishing and we are running out of time before Jesus returns. Do you understand that there's a lot of responsibility in getting married and raising a family in the Lord in the culture in which we live? Have you thought this through?

With that gloom and doom notice, on the other hand when is it not like that? If you want to live a married life and raise kids as believers in this world, are you willing to be hurt by them and are you willing to be hurt when they get hurt? If you don't think you can handle that Paul would say hold off. Maybe you're not mature enough yet. Pray about it. Wait on the Lord. But don't wait too long if you feel God is leading you that way. You'll never be completely ready and a lot of your training is on the fly. But make sure you understand this before you get married, Paul is reminding us.

Paul continues to work on this theme in vv.29-35 but he also broadens this to help people think about another aspect of marriage and the Christian life.

²⁹ What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ 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; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. ³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— ³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Again, the question isn't should we get married, another question to consider is ...

Will Being Married Help Us Both Live With an Undivided Loyalty to the Lord? (7:29-35)

So what does Paul mean when he says, 'those who have wives 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'. Essentially he is saying, don't get too excited about the good things in life and don't get depressed about bad things in life – Jesus is coming and we will spend all eternity with God.

Hang on to the things of this world loosely (vv.29-31)

It's easy to get caught up in the world. Christians shouldn't watch the news and get all depressed and hide in their closet. God is on the throne. He told us bad things would still happen. The world is full of sinners (including us) so people will do terrible things.

And when life is going well, thank the Lord for His blessings but don't fall apart when life isn't always like that. But what about 'live as if they weren't married?' What it doesn't mean is, go do what you want and ignore your spouse! What I believe Paul means in this list of pendulum swings, don't put all your hope in even the closest person in your life. Husbands will disappoint their wives; wives will disappoint their husbands. Only the Lord is fully trustworthy. The reality of life is, one of us will die before the other. That's hard. God is your strength. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. He will get you through even the actual valley of death. Hold on to the things and people of the world loosely knowing we will lose it all and them all at some point.

The other way we help each other live with an undivided loyalty to the Lord is,

Focus on how you can please God in whatever circumstances you are in (vv.32-35)

Focusing on the world and the things of this world is a major distraction to pleasing God. So Paul challenges his young singles to make your focus on pleasing God, period, with your life. How will being married help you do that? Marry someone who has the same goal in life. How will not being married help you do that? Surrounding yourselves with friendships that have the same goal. So Paul's pre-marital counseling would be to find someone who wants to please God with their life and now wants to do it with you. And that may mean you have to wait a bit to find someone. I believe God will direct you to that person if that is your heart's desire. God wants us to have an undivided loyalty towards Him. We can do that married. You can do that as a single also.

Paul reminds us that the challenge of marriage will bring more responsibilities in your life and you can be distracted by all the different circumstances that that brings into your life. Paul says these can restrict you but they don't have to. *live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

That means husbands and wives need to take turns with the kids and allow the other to have time with the Lord. Make going to church together as a family a priority. Make praying at your meals a priority. Involve your kids in these things. You don't have to be single to have an undivided loyalty to the Lord, but for married it will take discipline and perseverance because the things that hinder us and the sin that entangles will keep us from running the race marked out for us – us as a family.

And Paul has one more cautionary question that singles should ask themselves before they get married in vv.36-40,

Will I Commit to this Marriage for the Long Haul? (7:36-40)

³⁶ *If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.* ³⁷ *But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.* ³⁸ *So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.*

³⁹ *A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.* ⁴⁰ *In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.*

There are some interpretive challenges in these verses as a few translations speak of the father giving away his virgin daughter or about a young man engaged to a woman. There are more problems understanding it as the father and his daughter than the young man with his fiancé. But the main point remains the same; get them married because they need to be married.

The phrase acting improperly or acting dishonourably is not really explained but Paul is saying, get married if you're already acting 'dishonorably' and your passions are strong.

But remember if you marry you are bound to your spouse until death (v.39). That's God's plan and desire. Divorce happens, unfortunately. But don't get married if you're going in with the attitude that this is only temporary until you find someone better. No, marriage is for life. Paul states that singleness has its good points but if you marry, marry a believer (v.39), marry for life (v.38) and marry someone who will help you stay focused on pleasing God with your life as a family (v.35).

Paul answers the specific questions given him about marriage. He touched on divorce but his emphasis throughout was whether you marry or not, devote yourselves to the Lord. Some people are gifted to be satisfied in God alone and seek to please Him with their life. Those who get married will have more responsibilities. You will want to please your spouse and your kids – obviously. But if you really want to please them, please the Lord yourself by living to serve your spouse and your kids.

We're all too aware of the assassination attempt on Donald Trump earlier this week. The shooter, whose name does not interest me was killed. Sadly, a bystander in the crowd was killed by a bullet intended for Donald Trump. His name was Corey Comperatore. He was married and had two daughters in their 20's. He was an engineer who served as a volunteer firefighter with his local fire department, even serving as chief for a few years.

His one daughter said at his funeral he was "a man of God, [who] loved Jesus fiercely, and also looked after our church and our members as family."

When he heard the shots he immediately threw his wife and daughters to the ground, shielding them with his own body, taking a bullet that surely would have injured or even killed one of them. You can't decide beforehand how you're going to respond in a situation like that, but I think it's fair to say that Corey lived to please God and his family by serving them like Jesus, even to the point of immediately being willing to die for his wife and family.

For all that Paul has said about marriage – and not said about marriage – marriage is meant to be a lifetime commitment to serving the other. Our marriages break down when we want to be served. Jesus told His disciples in Mark 10:41-45, after they argued about who was more important, that the world runs on a serve-me basis. 'Not so with you'. Do you want to be first? Get down on your knees and serve others. Because the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. If you are married and want to stay married for life, serve the other as Jesus served us. Put their needs first. Don't worry about your needs. God will meet them as promised. Don't confuse your needs with your wants. When you commit to serving the other for life (one day at a time), I think you'll be less concerned about your needs and surprise yourself by realizing, this is very satisfactory. I'm content with how God is working in our lives. I want to keep pleasing God this way. That's how we understand our loyalties are not divided after all.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net