

God's Wisdom in an Age of Confusion

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Exalting Christ in Singleness

Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to EBC, please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 7:25.

Whether you are here this morning as someone who is single, married, divorced, widowed, I hope you hear the plea of Paul.

Let's pray...

Background to Corinth: Review

Laying the Christ-exalting foundation for Christian identity and morals

The big challenge Paul faces is forming their identity. As I have tried to show you, IDENTITY INFORMS BEHAVIOR. As followers of Jesus, we are *people who have been given new desires for a new destiny: fellowship with Christ!*

Last week Paul warns the Corinthians to not go back to their former practices, particularly visiting the temple-cult prostitutes. Unlike the views in Corinth, Paul says that immorality actually damages the body. And that our bodies have actually been bought with a price, and have become one with Jesus in the Spirit, that they are now temples of the Holy Spirit, and that we are to glorify God with our bodies, as they are destined for resurrection and eternity. I showed you a parallel passage from Philippians where Paul expresses his desire that Christ would be exalted in his body, whether by living or dying. We too are to have that same purpose in our lives.

Which leads us to our text...

Exposition of 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Paul prefers singleness to marriage

1 Cor. 7:25-28

First question: who are the "virgins"?

There is a debate among scholars as to what exactly Paul is referring to here with the "virgins" (men and women? Betrothed or engaged young woman?). Most likely it is addressed to young couples who were now under pressure to NOT marry due to the "spiritualists" in the church. So, it seems that the question is being raised concerning the temptation of sexual immorality of whether or not it is advisable for a young person to marry or not.

Second question: what is the "present distress"?

But what exactly is the "present distress" to which Paul is referring? Again, we have some options: a) coming famine; b) Christ's imminent return; c) distress of life in the anticipation of Christ's future return. Probably 3, though it could be 2.

Living with an "eternal perspective"

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Now, at first glance, this seems a bit disheartening – especially if you would like to get married. What is Paul doing here? He is giving us a perspective on life – remember, this isn't a direct commandment from God, it's a perspective. But, it's one that we obviously have to take seriously because this is part of the inspired scripture we have received. So, I want to suggest that we are to be challenged and shaped by this text, but we are not beholden to it.

Augustine: “We cannot love what is eternal unless we cease to love what is temporal...Learn to dismiss it before you are dismissed by it.”

The ancients used to refer to this kind of living as “holy detachment”, that we won't be ultimately defined by worldly things. Now, elsewhere in Paul's writings, he says that we are to enjoy earthly pleasures as God's good gifts to us. Let me show you:

The “earthly” sanctified by the “heavenly”

1 Timothy 4:1-4

Godliness with contentment is great gain

1 Timothy 6:6-10

So, again, we are being instructed by an apostle of Christ, who writes inspired scripture, and here not to command us, but to shape how we view both singleness, marriage in light of the present time we live in as people who await the return of Christ.

Undistracted devotion to the Lord

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

What's underneath all of this? Don't miss the deeper principle Paul is teaching here for us. Look at these other translations of v. 35:

ESV – “but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.”

NET – “so that without distraction you may give notable and constant service to the Lord.”

NIV – “that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”

NLT – “I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.”

Philips – “I tell you these things to help you; I am not putting difficulties in your path but setting before you an ideal, so that your service of God may be as far as possible free from worldly distractions.”

So, what then? Here is Paul's advice:

Marry if you must, but...

1 Corinthians 7:36-40

To summarize Paul's practical advice on marriage and singleness...

Marry if...passions are too strong

Marry if...you are “misbehaving” towards your betrothed (fiancé)

Marry if...your spouse has passed away, and it is “in the Lord” (another Christian)

But (in Paul's opinion), it is better to remain single so that we might devote ourselves even more so to Christ and service in His kingdom.

Main Idea:

Both marriage and singleness are good gifts from God and are intended to promote His glory. However, singleness provides a more advantageous context for promoting "undistracted devotion to Christ"

Application: Making the most of your singleness for Christ and His kingdom

View your singleness as a gift (from God, for Christ) rather than a burden

Understand your singleness as an advantage (for the gospel) rather than a detriment

Embrace your singleness as an opportunity (to serve Christ) rather than something that needs correcting

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why does Paul view singleness as an advantage over marriage?
- 2) What is the underlying principle Paul desires for all people (regardless of their marital status?) (hint: see v. 35).
- 3) How can you live a less distracted life and focus more on serving/growing deeper in Christ?
- 4) If you are single, how might the Lord want to use this season in your life to promote His glory and advance His kingdom through your life and witness?