

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Marriage During Difficult Times 1 Corinthians 7:29-40

Introduction

- In the previous section, Paul's intention was to help the Corinthian believers avoid unnecessary care and tribulation. He believed that the time was coming for unmarried believers when having a Christian spouse (and possibly young children) to care for would bring increased worry, distress, and anxiety, which would not be the case for a single believer in similar times. This leads directly into this section where Paul described married life during difficult times.

Advice About Marriage in Difficult Times (1 Cor 7:29-35)

- "The time has been shortened" (1 Cor 7:29) = drawn together, compacted, made short. Used only here and in Acts 5:6, where it described binding up Ananias' corpse. The same word was used in classical Greek for stowing sails, packing luggage, and reducing expenses. This may be connected to Paul's reference to their impending persecutions and trials (1 Cor 7:26).
- Paul then begins to list five situations which should not distract us from our devotion to God. All of these are intended to help illustrate what Paul was teaching about marriage.
 1. If a believer is married, he should not put his spouse before the Lord.
"Those who have wives should be as though they had none" = Here Paul is saying that believers should not allow their attachment to their loved ones to interfere with their duty to God. The Corinthians were not to allow their love for their spouse to alienate their affections from God. Married believers ought to be just as faithful to God as if they were unmarried. They should not allow their marital status to determine their level of spirituality!
 2. Sorrowful circumstances should not keep us from glorifying God.
"And those who weep, as though they did not weep" (1 Cor 7:30) = the weeping ones. The present active participle refers to those whose lives are characterized by weeping. There are circumstances in life when weeping is appropriate, but even in those circumstances believers should remember that God is in control. We should not let sorrow consume us, but we should focus on God even in difficult times.
 3. The joys of life should not distract us from fulfilling God's purpose for our life.
"And those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice" = the rejoicing ones. This refers to those whose lives are characterized by circumstances that bring joy or happiness. Christians *should* rejoice (Philippians 3:1; 4:4), but we should not allow the joys of this present earthly life to distract us from focusing on our devotion to God and our ultimate joy in His presence for eternity. A focus on rejoicing in earthly delights should not distract the believer from taking advantage of the ministry opportunities that God has assigned to him.
 4. Commercial gain or career success should not hinder us from gaining true spiritual riches.
"And those who buy, as though they did not possess" = the buying ones. The word *agorazo* means to do business in the market, and this refers to those whose lives are characterized by a focus on commercial and occupational success. Our involvement in business should never be allowed to get in the way of our complete devotion to God. We should never allow the getting and keeping of material possessions to be the focus of our lives.
 5. Believers should not indulge in *everything* the world has to offer.
"And those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it" (1 Cor 7:31) = those whose lives are characterized by fully using the resources of this earthly world system, to the point of overusing or abusing them to excess. Obviously it is right to use the resources of this world in appropriate ways so that we can provide food, clothing, shelter, protection, and the

necessities of life for ourselves and our loved ones. Here Paul is condemning someone who uses worldly resources to excess, centering their life around indulging in worldly pleasure and material comfort.

- "For the form of this world is passing away" = The form (*schema*) of this earthly world system is passing (*parago*) off the stage of history. This world system is like the scenery for a stage play, and its time for use will soon come to an end. Applying this to marriage, believers should understand that the divine institution of marriage belongs to an age that is passing away. Although it is a wonderful God-ordained institution, marriage is not an eternal relationship. Marriage will also pass away because it is designed only for this world, not for the next.
- For believers who are completely wrapped up in the affairs of this world, including marriage and commerce, it will be almost impossible for them to be "free from anxiety or care" (1 Cor 7:32). But this is God's desire for all believers, and it is possible for a Christian who understands that God is in control and that the world as we know it is passing away.
- Paul now contrasts what an *unmarried vs. a married* person is concerned about. The unmarried believer is able to focus undivided attention on serving the Lord, and focus himself primarily on the Lord's desires and interests. By contrast, a married believer *cannot help* being concerned about some of the things of this world and about pleasing his wife (1 Cor 7:33). The same will be said of the wife in the very next verse, so what is said here applies equally to both male and female believers.
- "His interests are divided" (1 Cor 7:34) = this is the main problem that Paul wants to guard against in the life of a believer (whether married or single). Our devotion to God should not be divided or parceled out between the things of this world and God.
- Keep in mind that this passage is discussing the marriage of two Christians, not a "mixed" marriage or an "inter-faith" marriage. Here in this passage Paul describes the difficulties of a *Christian* marriage. One can only imagine how those difficulties would be compounded in a mixed or inter-faith marriage! The point Paul is making here is that, whether married or single, a believer must try to maintain a single-minded devotion to the Lord. The following chart summarizes what Paul has taught in these three verses:

The Primary Focus of the Unmarried	The Divided Focus of the Married
Concerned about the things of the Lord	Concerned about the things of the world
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How he may please the Lord [v. 32] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How he may please his wife [v. 33]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That she may be holy (body & spirit) [v.34] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How she may please her husband [v. 34]

- It is obvious from this verse that Paul's only motive is for their good. He does not intend his advice about marriage to put a restraint upon them (1 Cor 7:35). He has not given a command to the unmarried, but simply a considered opinion in view of the impending circumstances. He leaves the ultimate choice completely up to them as individuals, and either choice is acceptable -- their marital status is not a matter of holiness vs. sin. Paul's main goal is to promote undistracted devotion to the Lord, regardless of a believer's marital status. Whether married or single, if a believer is distracted from his devotion to the Lord then something is wrong.

Advice to Those Responsible for Unmarried Young Women (1 Cor 7:36-38)

- "If any man" (1 Cor 7:36) = Here Paul addresses a man who is responsible for a virgin under his care. In order to correctly identify this man, it may be best to begin with the verb in 1 Cor 7:38 -- *gamizo* = to *give* in marriage, to *permit* to marry. The subject of this verb cannot be the groom, but the one who is giving away the bride. It seems best to identify this man as the Christian father or guardian of a young unmarried woman who is also a believer.
- "Thinks he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter" = What would lead a Christian father to think he may be acting unfairly toward his virgin daughter? This may have been a father who wanted to

keep his daughter at home in view of the benefit and service she was contributing to the household. There may have been any of several selfish reasons for doing this, but this is not what a loving father should do.

- Two characteristics of the virgin daughter:

1. She is "past her youth" = ripe and perhaps over-ripe (of marriageable age or even over-age).
2. "If it must be so" = if there is a present necessity; if the time has come to consider it seriously. This implies that a potential groom has come into view!

- This presents a picture of a father who is questioning his decision to keep his virgin daughter at home beyond the age at which she might have married. He now realizes that it may have been improper for him to have done this, especially when she may have had a suitable prospect of marriage. Paul's decision in this case is that the father should do what he wishes, he does not sin. Just as Paul did not put any restraint on unmarried believers in his earlier instruction (1 Cor 7:35), so here he does not put any restraint on a Christian father to keep his daughter in a state of singleness.
- "Let them marry" = the word *them* implies that there is a potential groom in view! The plural here refers to the daughter and the man she wants to marry. Evidently the turning point in the father's thinking has been brought about by the appearance of a suitable husband!
- "But he who stands firm in his heart" (1 Cor 7:37) = here Paul presents the contrasting point when the father believes he has not treated his daughter unfairly by keeping her unmarried and at home. He still thinks he is doing the right thing in keeping his daughter unmarried -- that she can serve the Lord better by remaining single than by being married. The word *keep* (*tereo*) means to guard, watch over, keep safe, and protect from harm. This is the primary focus of the father's efforts toward his daughter.
- "He will do well" (*kalos*) = in the previous case Paul had said that it was not a sin for the father to let the couple get married (1 Cor 7:36), but in this case where the father keeps his daughter unmarried and under his protection, Paul says the father is doing a good thing. Then in 1 Cor 7:38 Paul reviewed both cases:
 1. The father who gives his virgin daughter in marriage does well, and
 2. The father who does not give her in marriage will do better.

Again Paul expressed his inspired opinion in view of the impending circumstances, that remaining unmarried may be better under the circumstances. But it is not a matter of one decision being a sin while the other decision is the right choice. Both decisions may be right and perfectly acceptable given a prayerful evaluation of the circumstances in each specific case.

Instruction about the Permanence of Marriage (1 Cor 7:39-40)

- "Bound as long as her husband lives" (*deo*) = the perfect tense emphasizes the continuing state or condition that results from entering into the marriage covenant. This says that the partners are bound by law for the entire span of time (*chronos*) that their partners are alive. This clearly implies that the bond of marriage can only be broken by the death of one of the marriage partners. Nothing is said here of the possibility of divorce and remarriage for believers whose spouse is still living, and no "exception clause" is given in this passage. If a believer wanted to justify divorcing his wife, this Scripture passage would not be one that would support that option.
- "If her husband is dead, she is free to marry" = this addresses the issue of remarriage for a Christian widow -- she is no longer bound to her former marriage relationship but is free to remarry. BUT, she must marry another believer ("only in the Lord"). This teaches against the idea of a believer deliberately entering into a mixed marriage (also see 2 Cor 6:14-15).
- "In my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is" (1 Cor 7:40) = the word happier is *makarios*, the inner peace that is experienced by a believer despite the outward circumstances. In view of the impending circumstances, Paul advocated remaining single. However, in 1 Tim 5:11 Paul implies that younger Christian widows should remarry if they are unable to control their passions (also see 1 Cor 7:8-9). Again, Paul leaves the choice up to the individual believer as to whether or not to get married, after considering his God-ordained circumstances.
- In this section Paul is teaching about the permanence of the Christian marriage relationship, but this has implications for the unmarried believers he has been addressing in this section. Although unmarried believers are free to get married, they should keep in mind that they are bound to that relationship for

the rest of their lives!

Points of Application

- Every Christian should understand the realities of married life, as described by the apostle Paul. Marriage is a wonderful institution sanctioned by God, but it is not without its spiritual distractions! Believing men and women should commit to encouraging each other's spiritual growth, even if it may mean being willing to sacrifice their own needs, desires, or expectations. They should help each other to put God first in their lives -- as individuals and as a couple.
- As Christians we should remember that our time in this world is short, and we should always live with eternity in view. We should remember not to get too wrapped up in the affairs of this world, but to hold worldly things in an open hand. We should focus on undistracted devotion to the Lord in whatever circumstance of life He has put us, and we should always strive to maintain holiness both in body and in spirit.
- We should also remember that God's plan for marriage is that it should be a life-long commitment between one Christian man and one Christian woman. Each of us (whether we are married or single) should uphold this important truth, and we can pray that God would use each of us to glorify Him by encouraging others to live according to this truth.

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Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).