

Wisdom for the Never-Married

1 Corinthians 7:25-35

INTRODUCTION

Why is marriage so important in the Bible?

From creation to the the nation of Israel to the Church of Jesus Christ – marriage has always been a picture of a divine relationship between God and his people

Creation reminds us that marriage was God’s divine ideal for humanity – to help humanity bear and promote the glory of God through man’s bearing God’s image in the world.

Often times in Scripture, God likened his relationship with the nation of Israel to that of a marriage relationship.

The New Testament paints the portrait of the church of Jesus Christ being his bride, and human marriage aiming to reflect that portrait in their own union.

But – marriage isn’t the most important relationship in the Bible – that between you and Christ is.

Marriage is temporary – as Jesus taught in Matt 19 – in eternity – we will not maintain our marriage relationships – will not be given in marriage – or remain married – our relationship with one another will be as close as the best of human marriage was – and our devotion to Christ will be greater and perfectly pure.

Some devote themselves in singleness to serving Christ – and that is a gift from God – and a profound

blessing to the church. Nothing second rate or missing in such devotion.

And while marriage may be the norm – it is not a mandate for everyone.

So, if you are not married – how should you think about the spirituality of marriage

How should you think about your singleness?

If the opportunity to marriage is possible, how should you think about it?

In 1 Corinthians 7:25-35, Paul provides 3 pieces of divine advice for the never-married in thinking about marriage and their current state of singleness.

I. BE CONTENT IN YOUR SINGLENES v v 25-28

Not merely “with” singleness – but in your state of singleness
Doesn’t mean it shouldn’t change – but if it doesn’t –
learn to be content

Now concerning the betrothed

If using the ESV – see the note –
Lit – the word “virgins”

Used 6x in this chapter – all beginning here

Notice who we have addressed thus far in this chapter:

The unmarried and the widows – v 8 –
divorced and widowed – previously married

The married – v 10

The mixed married vv 12-16

Who is left – “the virgins” – those who have never been married

Why translate “betrothed” – the context seems to assume that they have potential to marry – there is someone who they have the actual potential to be married to (at least in vv 36ff)

So – some state this is a person engaged to be married

Not convinced of this – until v 36 – when it is clear – use of personal pronouns “his” virgin

But here

When the word is used in the rest of the NT and actually refers to a betrothed woman – the actual word for “betrothal” is also used

i.e., Matt 1:18 – Mary betrothed to Joseph; Lk 1:27; 2 Cor 11:2

When the word is referring to women or men who have never been married – not necessarily betrothed – uses this word

10 virgins of Matt 25:1 (women who accompany a bridegroom – no engagement whatsoever)

Rev 14:4

(Rev. 14:4 ESV) It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb,

the use of this word here – does not indicate gender (gender is indicated in the remaining verses – but not necessarily here)

Also – vv 32-34 – no formal tie is mentioned between the men and women who are marked by this term (betrothal required official divorce if broken – a betrothed woman would be concerned about the things of her betrothed)

Throughout the passage – Paul has been addressing both men and women and how his principles impact each – he has been redundant in doing so

So – most likely – this is a heading to discuss the never married

They may or may not have opportunity

This is about how to think about their condition as a single person who has never been married before.

Notice – this is not divine commands – but wise counsel

I have no command . . .

This is not take-it or leave-it advice – not commanded – but wise, faithful – full of gospel-focused wisdom

V 26

Present distress –

Some read into this end-time – prophetic language
But these are not the normal terms used to describe the times of the period of tribulation described in eschatological (end-time) passages

Prob not the main idea

Perhaps specific to the Corinthian situation – a regional famine – time of specific trial on the whole area

But more likely – this is general – because of the present state of difficulties in this era

It is challenging being a Christian in the 1st Century – and any century

Christianity is a narrow road – not according the pattern of the world – counter-cultural to what the society values – requires a devotion that loves Christ above every other human relationship

Good for a person to remain as he is

A person = *ανθρωπος* – can refer to both men and women

Picks up on what we were looking at last week in vv 17-24

Don't be discontent with your current assignment from the Lord – love and honor him in that

And further more – it is good, in light of the added difficulties that come from living our Christianity if married or with children and extended family.

V 27 – explains further

Bound to a wife

Lit – bound to a woman – not the normal words for marriage per se - could refer to engagement/betrothal

or marriage – both are likely in view – do you have formal ties of commitment to a woman?

Loosed from a wife

Not the typical term for divorce – only used here in the NT

Free – not tied in any formal way to a woman

Do not seek

Don't preoccupy yourself with seeking – present tense

i.e., don't be constantly fretting over this – either way
 Marriage is holding me back – is discontentedness
 I've got to be married – is discontentedness

Does this mean that the never married should never marry?

v 28

not sin to marry – marriage is good – marriage is spiritual –
 marriage is right in the right situation and circumstances

But – don't forget

Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that

Affliction in the flesh – earthly difficulties will come –
 because you are bound in an earthly relationship

Two sinners bound together in a relationship of
 life-long commitment – breeds double the difficulty
 and challenge

Challenge and difficulty do not equal something wrong/sinful – less spiritual – simply requiring a different expression – more intense application of grace

This doesn't mean that singles won't have challenges
Yes they will – but they are challenges with one, not two – and not with the added degree of challenge that comes with children and in-laws

Practical pastoral advice

The issue advocated here is one of contentment in your state

Apply the lessons of last week – to breed a God-centered contentment in your heart that your present circumstances – married, unmarried, free, slave, Jew/Gentile – whatever they might be – is the Lord's chosen assignment for you to live out your loyalty to the Lord

And – yes – you may have chosen the path of marriage or singleness – you may have chosen the path of children or not – the job you have – the state you live in

But even those choices you have made now constitute God's assignment for you – his providence rules over even the choices we make

You gain God-given responsibilities when you make choices that require commitments of loyalty and devotion to others

So – embrace them in a contented way
Trust the goodness of God – even if there is challenge and difficulty involved

If God has seen fit to ordain these days and circumstances for you – he will lovingly lead you through them by his grace – and you can trust in that

It all depends upon what you will pursue God in your circumstances – that means you are not after a purely tranquil life – you are after life as God leads

Or personal peace and a freedom from all challenging concern – which may be more fixed on the expectations you set for yourself – ignoring them as what God has ordained

So – for the never married – be content in your singleness – don't be preoccupied with getting married – it is good to remain single

But if you have opportunity and want to marry – it is not sinful – will just require a different and unique dependence on God's grace with the inevitable challenges that come

That's the first piece of divine wisdom for the never married – be content in your singleness

But we don't end with that – it is not merely sitting in contentment – but actually requires the pursuit of something

II. BE FOCUSED ON WHAT IS ETERNAL vv 29-31

I say

Going to add to what he has just said – it is contentment – and more

The appointed time has grown very short

The season (καιρος) is limited (here and Acts 5:5 – wrapped him up (Ananias who was dead) –

This season of life that we are in – married – unmarried – never married – it is all very limited – it is bound by time as we know and experience it

We are in an era where we are awaiting something unbound by time and is unlimited – eternity

So – what does our anticipation of a limitless eternity mean for our present season that has a short amount of time associated with it

What do we do with our limited lives in light of an unlimited eternity?

BTW – this way of thinking is only relevant for the Christian – the non-Christian can't even think like this – there is no eternal life of responsibility and joy in eternity – this life is the best there is

But for the Christian – this life is not all there is to life – there is far more beyond this limited time we have here – and we are to live in light of what is to come – not merely in light of what is now

What should this look like – a series of 5 different scenarios – showing how to live with the present in light of the eternal

From now on – for the rest of the time

Let those who have wives live as though they had none

Be careful here – see this in light of the rest of what is said

Similar to Jesus saying

You must hate mother, father, brother sister to have me

The idea in each is not to abandon your commitments – that would be contrary to everything he has already said

But – you must live exclusively for what is bound to this limited time while ignoring what is eternal

You must live for what is eternal – and not completely wrapped up with the things of time

Look at each

R&P 154 – The meaning of the illustrations is fairly clear. Married men are apt to become absorbed in domestic cares, mourners in their sorrow, buyers in the preservation of what they have bought. A Christian with dangers all round him and the Advent close at hand, ought not to be engrossed in any of his surroundings, knowing how temporary they are. He should learn how to sit loose to all earthly ties.

What a powerful and counter-intuitive way to think and live.

What is dominating your time and efforts – your thinking – your passions – your dreams

How much of what you are devoted to today – will evaporate – or not even be present in eternity?

What of eternal value are you ignoring today because you are so wrapped up in what will last only in this limited and fading world?

Including your relationships

Not that these relationships and endeavors are not important and even essential to give time and attention to

But are you so fixated on them – that you are ignoring what will ultimately last?

This is such a profound way to live
So that nothing earth-bound defines and devours all of your focus and energy

Are you caught up in marriage so that you ignore eternal applications of discipleship in others

Are you so caught up in your sorrows over the loss of earthly things that you can find no focused joy in what will last for eternity?

Are you so enamored with maintaining earthly pleasures – that the things of Scripture are set aside?

Are you so preoccupied with your job – your possessions – and gaining all you can of this present world – that you are ignoring what is necessary for developing your soul for eternity in the here and now?

What will you profit if you gain everything you wanted in this world and had nothing for all eternity?

Live in a focused way – focused on what is eternal

You can do that in your marriage, in your sorrow – in your joy – in your use of earthly treasures

But it requires a certain kind of unified focus in your marriage – and if you are single – you are tempted to live for yourself and your own convictions – and not for the eternal good of others

And while you may have the life you want to live – do you have the eternity that is best for your soul?

How focused is your living – especially if you have never been married

It is far more challenging to be eternally focused if you are engaged in earthly life-commitments that require your legitimate time and attention

Which leads Paul and us to the third piece of spiritual advise – wisdom for the never married to focus upon

Live content in your singleness
Live focused on what is eternal

And third:

III. BE UNDIVIDED IN DEVOTION TO CHRIST vv 32-35

Everyone should live free from anxiety

Matt 6:25ff; Phil 4:6 – no concerns – anxiety should control us and debilitate us – but there are concerns that we must give attention to

But there are certain anxieties – concerns that simply come with the territory

And our anxieties are often tied to who we need to legitimate please – or honor or care for

Note each

What is the ultimate goal of this advice
V 35

CONCLUSION

Be content in your singleness
Be focused on what is eternal
Be undivided in devotion to Christ

Not that you can't have good, legitimate opportunity to change your situation – to get married

But – until that opportunity presents itself – and even if it does – there is more to consider

Do you see how central the Lord must be in how we think and live?