

Title: Are you Ready for this?
Text: 1 Cor. 7.25-35
Theme: Is this the right time to get married?
Series: 1 Corinthians series #29
Prop Stmt. Considering the question of marriage should involve a consideration of its impact upon your ministry for Christ.

Read Text:

Men, if you are married and your wife is here, I recommend that if you happen to laugh at the story that I am about to tell, that you not laugh too loudly. The story is called the world's shortest fairy tale. It was sent to me by a friend who for obvious reasons will remain anonymous.

Once upon a time there was a guy who asked a girl to marry him. She said "no." So, he bought a gun, a boat and golf clubs and spent the rest of his life hunting, fishing, golfing and watching all of the football that he wanted and he lived happily ever after.

In the KJV of the Bible, the apostle Paul writes in 1 Thess 4.13, "I would not have you ignorant, brethren concerning those who are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope." Well, in Baptist history, one of our missionary heroines is a lady named Lottie Moon. She is with the Lord now, but she was single, fiercely independent, and wondrously effective for the cause of Christ in China. Lottie Moon became more than a single missionary, she was like an institution. Well, one day in a large gathering of church leaders, Lottie was asked why it was that she never married. She brought the house down when she quoted part of 1 Thess 4.13 and said, "I would not you have you ignorant brethren.

I don't think that was exactly what Paul had in mind when he answered this question to the people at Corinth, but in a round about way, he is making this point that when you are married, it changes the way that you live. In this passage, Paul does not talk about the details of having to share the bathroom, or adjusting to each other's idiosyncrasies. That is what we often think of when we consider marriage. What is this person really like in the morning? I don't know if you know this or not, but I have a twitch that affects the right side of my face. I have had this for almost 30 years. Sometimes it only affects my right eye, other times it affects my right cheek, but if you are in a serious conversation with me, and my face is doing this twitching thing, it can be downright distracting. When Cathi and I were dating in college, this twitch almost drove her crazy. She just wanted to reach out and hold my face in place. But considering the college we attended, that would not have been wise. She wondered, if this guy asks me to marry him, how can I spend the rest of my life looking at this twitching face? When we think about marriage, these types of issues come into play, but this text challenges us to think a little bigger and little deeper about the question of should we get married and if we should, when should we do it? Marriage is great, but this text is pointing out that singleness has some real advantages too.

Really, what we have in this text is more straight talk about a sensitive topic. God is so gracious to give us such important, compelling and yet sensitive counsel about the personal issues of life. This letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in the church of Corinth was based upon the fact that he had heard that they were going through some problems. But, the church had also sent him a letter with apparently a list of questions or topics that he is responding to. That really appears to be what is happening right here. Verse 25 says, “Now about virgins” or “Concerning those who are unmarried.” This section is Paul’s answer to their question about whether those who are not married should intentionally pursue marriage. In v.25, Paul is careful to explain that what he is telling them is not a rule, but is more like a guideline that really ought to be considered by those contemplating marriage. In other words, Paul is saying, I do not have a rule from the Lord that I am placing you under. However, I do want to talk to you and address some issues that you need to think about if you are considering marriage. He then mentions that his counsel is worthy of trust because of the Lord’s mercy to him. So, that brings us to what I consider to be the main point of verses 25-31. If you are thinking about marriage – look before you leap. Do not be so quick to jump into it, but

1. **Use some Wisdom** (25-31)

a. **In view of your circumstances** (25-28)

When Paul talks about the “present crisis” in v.26, I do not know what he is talking about but obviously the Corinthians did. Some have thought that the “present crisis” was a localized time of persecution that the church was facing, or that Paul was referring to more of an economic issue, such as a grain shortage or famine that affected the area to some degree. The bottom line is we do not know for certain. But, again, keep in mind that Paul is not laying down a rule, he is trying to help the believers think about the bigger picture. And in light of the present circumstance, it is probably best for you to remain as you are (26b-27).

I think the NIV translators missed it a bit on v.27. The NIV in an effort to translate phrases in a smooth, readable fashion, every once in a while will end up doing too much interpretation instead of sticking to translation. In this verse, the original language says, are you bound to a woman? Granted that often has the idea of being married, but since in v.25 we find out that Paul is addressing those who have not married yet, then it would be better to stick with the literal translation. A guy who is bound to a woman, but is not yet married, is engaged or betrothed. Should they go ahead and get married, or should they call it off or postpone it because of the current crisis? If you are bound to a woman, do not seek a release and if you are free, then do not seek to get married.

In v.28 he goes on to explain that if you go ahead and get married, you have not sinned, but, because getting married commits you to being responsible for others beyond yourself, think this through. Marriage is not the answer that solves all of life’s problems. Marriage can provide companionship and intimacy, but it does not guarantee true companionship, and it is not a cure-all for immorality. In fact, when a person brings unresolved issues with him into marriage, he or she now involves another person in the

mess. So, what Paul is saying here is, “In light of the problems that we are already facing, are you absolutely certain that you want the additional responsibilities and challenges that come from being married?”

Let’s say that one of our young men, who is in the army, is very, very interested in one of our young ladies. And let’s say that this man finds out that he is being deployed to Iraq for an unspecified amount of time. And he calls this girl and says, “I have a 48-hour pass before I have to report. Let’s get married before I leave.” Now, did anything like this ever happen during WWII? It happened all of the time – didn’t it? Is it wrong for this couple to get married? No, but is it wise? Think about it. Is she going to stay living at home while you are gone? Is she going to live in the housing on your base? Is there a possibility that you will not come back? Are you really ready for this or do you just want to have legalized intimacy before you face death?

I love this passage, not because it is the easiest passage to preach, but because I think we really see the heart of this man. He really, really loves these people. It is as if Paul is sitting at a table with a young man, reaching out and holding his twitching face in his hands, and looking at him straight in the eye and saying, “son, think about what you are going to put this girl through.” You have to think beyond the first night. You have to think about the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year. But, in the next verse, he widens the lens a bit. It is as if he is saying that this reminds him of another point that he wants to make and that is, we have to live in view of the end.

b. In view of the end (29-31)

Paul is teaching that we are already living in the final days. That does not mean that you do not get married. What that means is that you need to evaluate everything you do. Do not live as if the present world order is going to be here forever, because it won’t be. This passage is like an orientation course for believers. Paul is saying, “here let me help you get used to what your life-view ought to be.” You are used to living with certain things that appear to be permanent, but in reality are temporary. You need to understand that. Recognize that if you are married, fine, but you will not be permanently related in marriage, but, you will be permanently related to Christ. A great marriage may be “made in heaven” but it won’t last in heaven. It is easy to think, when I die, I can’t wait to see my mom, dad, husband, wife, etc. But in heaven, we will no longer relate to them in that way, but in heaven, that will not be a disappointment in any way. The present order of things will then be completely changed. (31b)

Mourning over loss and laughing over circumstances are not the final word. Both are temporary. Do not allow your sorrow over things in life to overwhelm you. It will pass. Neither think that because you are on easy street today, that life will always be like this. You have to buy, sell, plant, harvest, eat, work, and use things and the structures of this world, but realize that they are temporary and that our hope is not governed by them. As followers of Christ, this world and its labels, groupings and values is never the means by which we create or define our lives.

2. Understand your Responsibilities (32-35)

The main idea of these verses is this. The single person is generally able to focus more of his life on the Lord because he is not distracted by the responsibilities that come from being married. The less pressure and distractions a person has in life, the easier it is for him or her to focus on the Lord. Unmarried people usually have less to be responsible for. Therefore, this gives them more opportunities to give their undivided devotion to the Lord.

I am your pastor and I happily have that position and responsibility. But, there is a sense in which I have a divided loyalty. You do not have my full attention 24-7. I am married and I am a father. It does not matter if the church has 50 people or 5000 people, there are times when a pastor who is married has to make decisions about what he can and cannot do. There are times when someone else can preach a sermon, but my wife has only one husband. There are times when someone else can perform a wedding, but my kids have only one dad. There are certain things that I absolutely as a husband and as a father, have to do, and that may disappoint people from time to time, but that is the way that it is. If I was single, then I would not have the added responsibilities of a family. But I am married, and happily so. There are times, when my position as your pastor and my role as a husband and father collide. I really try to avoid that, but sometimes it happens anyway.

This past year was my son's senior year in high school. He was the homecoming king for his school, and my daughter was elected to the court from her class. What an incredible event for any parents, and Cathi and I were understandably thrilled. Of course, it is a wonderful honor for a dad to be able to escort his daughter and at the same time watch his son, and it would have been a wonderful honor for me if I was able to be there. I wasn't there. I couldn't be there. I was in Russia teaching Romans. There was no way that I could be home in time when I found out that this was going to take place. My kids knew that, Bobby is not scarred for life, and Rebecca did not shave her head and join a punk-band. But, if I had to do it over, knowing what I know now, someone else could teach Romans, but no one else can be my kid's dad. When you are married and you have a family, there are times when you are torn by your responsibilities.

Single missionaries have less to worry about than married ones. Single ministers have less to worry about than married ones. That is just the way that it is. The greatest heartache in life is not what happens to yourself, but what happens to those who are the closest to you. When you are married and you have family, they weigh upon you and they should. You cannot function in the ministry very well with one arm tied behind your back. John Wesley was a very famous preacher in England and the founder of the Methodist and Wesleyan church, but his marriage fell apart in part because he completely neglected his wife. William Carey is considered the patriarch of the modern missions movement, but again, it would have been better for him to be single, because the demands that he made on his wife eventually contributed to her completely losing her mind. Both of these men would have been better off being single. But, being single does not guarantee that you will be more focused on the Lord, and being married does not

automatically mean that you will not be devoted to the Lord. But if you are a follower of Christ, your ultimate goal is to please God. When considering the question of marriage, use wisdom and understand your responsibilities. There are many wives who are held back in their effectiveness for Christ and His church because of husbands and many husbands who are held back because of their wives, and sometimes it is because of practical and physical concerns, not spiritual ones.

In recent weeks, we have become a bit overwhelmed with Katrina, Rita and now the earthquakes in Pakistan. If we were living in the midst of any of these events, they would certainly constitute a “present crisis” for us. Life, as we know it would be radically changed. When events like this seem to be happening with a greater degree of regularity, it makes you wonder – doesn’t it? Is this something that has always taken place in the history of the world and our present technology simply allows us to be aware of more things than before or is it possible that these events are actually a precursor or part of what we would call “end time” events? We do not know the answer to that.

I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet – but I do work for a non-profit organization. But as I look at the local economy, the weather events, the political landscape and the religious trends, it certainly seems to be that in the next ten years we are in for some major changes in this world. Is it any more than the colossal changes that took place back in the 30’s and 40’s? I don’t know. God knows. The Bible is not given as a crystal ball for us to figure out every detail of the future and live with a sly smugness as a result. But this present world order is going to pass away. You and I need to live with an awareness, that every day could be our last, yet with a confident joy, knowing that God has ordered our very steps.

So, do you see the wisdom of this passage? You, the believer, have to figure this out for yourself. This is not an absolute rule. When considering marriage you have to ask yourself in light of everything going on, is my being married going to impact my availability for ministry? The answer is, it probably will. But that is not the only question to ask. The other question to consider is this. Is my being married going to enhance my effectiveness in ministry? In my case, the answer to the second question is a thousand times Yes! But, getting ready for marriage involves thinking through this issue.