

Reasons for Remaining Single, Part 1: Because of the World

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:25–31

Code: 1831

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul deals with problems surrounding the issue of marriage. But specifically in verses 25-31, he gives six reasons for remaining single. In his discussion of marriage and singleness, Paul has made it clear that neither state is spiritually better than the other.

Spirituality is not based on your marital status, but your obedience to God.

A. The Biblical Basis for Marriage

Throughout the seventh chapter, Paul has shown a balanced approach toward the issue of singleness and marriage. The Bible gives a very balanced view in the area of marriage, and it recognizes that for whom the Lord wills, singleness is better than marriage. The church needs to maintain a balance in understanding this most important issue. To better understand the balance between singleness and marriage, we need to see other passages in the Bible that emphasize the reality of marriage.

1. The grace of marriage

The apostle Peter called marriage "the grace of life" in 1 Peter 3:7: "In like manner, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life."

2. The picture of marriage

In Ephesians 5:22-32, the apostle Paul describes marriage as the picture of Christ's relationship to the Church. He said, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the savior of the body. Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (vv. 22-24).

3. The institution of marriage

In Matthew 19:4-6, the Lord Himself acknowledged that marriage is a sacred and holy thing instituted by God. He said, "Have ye not read that he who made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore, they are no more two, but one flesh. What, therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

B. The Biblical Basis for Singleness

While recognizing the normalcy of marriage, the Bible also recognizes singleness as an option for the Christian. Many books, conferences, and programs today focus on the biblical standards for marriage and the family. While many of those are very helpful, much less attention is given to what the Bible says about singleness. A great deal of contemporary literature and programs for singles is directed toward helping them "endure" while they wait for marriage. It seems to reflect an underlying assumption that being single is not quite normal and is certainly not desirable.

As soon as some of our daughters reach the age of 20 to 22, we begin to panic if they don't have marriage in sight. And if our sons are 20 to 25 and aren't married, we begin to wonder if they have a secret problem that we don't know about. Often the result of those kinds of worries is marriages that can turn out to be disastrous. Such marriages turn out to be the will of the parents, not the will of God. The first thing a father and mother can do in this situation is to consider whether God has

designed their child to be single. The Bible also teaches a balanced approach concerning the possibility of remaining single. First Corinthians 7 gives three basic principles concerning the decision regarding singleness.

1. Singleness is good

In 1 Corinthians 7:1 Paul says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." We've learned that the phrase "to touch a woman" means to have a sexual relationship. Paul is emphasizing that it is good for a man to remain single and not to marry.

2. Singleness is a gift

Paul says in verse 7 that "every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." God gifts certain people with singleness. It's not that they cannot find someone to marry; It's that they do not choose to marry because God has enabled them to withstand sexual desire for the sake of advancing His kingdom through undivided service. Remaining single for them is a gift from God.

3. Singleness is not related to salvation

Your marital status has no relationship to salvation. Your becoming a Christian is not conditioned on whether you are married or single. For example, you should neither divorce your spouse now that you are saved, because you think you could have a greater devotion to God. This was precisely the conflict in Corinth. The Jewish leaders were saying you had to get married and the Gentiles were saying you must be celibate. The apostle Paul says in verse 20, "Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called." You are to remain in whatever state you were saved.

LESSON

Paul writes verses 25-40 to encourage those people who have the gift of singleness. Admittedly, many who are single have difficulty because sin alone has brought on their singleness, and they have to lie in the empty bed they made for themselves. But for the person to whom God has given the gift of singleness are many practical advantages. In an effort to answer all the questions the Corinthians had concerning this issue, Paul gives six reasons for remaining single: (1) the pressure of the system (vv. 25-27), (2) the problems of the flesh (v. 28), (3) the passing of the world (vv. 29-31), (4) the preoccupations of marriage (vv. 32-35), (5) the promises of fathers (vv. 36-38), and (6) the permanency of marriage (vv. 39-40).

I. THE PRESSURE OF THE SYSTEM (vv. 25-27)

"Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give my judgement, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose, therefore, that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife."

A. The Audience (v. 25)

In order to understand the passage, we must understand who Paul is speaking to. The Greek word Paul uses for "virgin" is parthen[ma]on. It refers to someone who is unmarried. And since it is used with the feminine article, it is referring to unmarried girls. The word for virgin can be used for men such as in Revelation 14:4, but here in 1 Corinthians 7:25, it is used with the feminine article denoting single girls.

Paul is speaking to virgin daughters who were unmarried.

B. The Authority

Paul says concerning these virgins, "I have no command of the Lord." Again, as in verse 12, Paul points out that Jesus gave no direct teaching on singleness, although He alluded to it in Matthew 19:12. Yet the apostle's teaching is no less divine and authoritative. When the Lord stated a command, Paul quoted it. And when the Lord gave no command while He was on earth, Paul made that clear. In verse 12 Paul said, "To the rest speak I not the Lord." In other words, "Here's an issue Jesus did not speak on, so I'm going to address it."

1. Paul's conviction

Paul says in verse 25, "I give my judgement." Paul is simply saying there were issues that the Lord Himself addressed and there were some He did not. But when the Lord did not speak about a particular issue, His apostle's often did, and it came as though it were straight from Him. Sometimes when the apostles spoke, they gave absolute, authoritative commands, but on other occasions, they gave only guidelines because there could be no absolutes. Paul, in this passage, is giving a guideline for living in the present age. Because all Scripture is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16), this is not just Paul's advice, but the advice of the Holy Spirit, through the apostle.

2. Paul's character

Paul not only shared his convictions, but also lived out the high advice he gave. He describes himself as one "that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful" (v. 25). As an apostle who by the mercy of the Lord was found trustworthy, Paul's conviction was that it is better for single Christians to remain that way, if they have that gift from God. Although this perspective is authoritative, it is not given as an absolute command. It is guideline--thoroughly dependable advice--and is stated twice in verse 26 as being "good." When he says later in verse 40, "I think also that I have the Spirit of God," he is not saying he is not sure; he is being sarcastic with those in the congregation who acted as if they alone had the mind of the Spirit.

By the phrase, "One that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful," Paul is saying he had been given an unusual insight into truth. He is saying, "You can trust my judgment." Paul, by God's grace, had been given unusual insights into truth. The Corinthians could trust what he had to say. Paul felt indebted to the mercy of Christ for the truths he had gained. Christ, by His grace, made him an authoritative apostle.

C. The Antagonism (v. 26)

Paul says, "I suppose, therefore, that this is good for the present distress" (v. 26). The phrase, "I suppose," is somewhat misleading. The Greek word is *nomiz[ma]o*, which means "I hold," or "I consider." This is not a guess for Paul, but a conviction.

1. The Christian's conflict

The first reason Paul gives for remaining single is the pressure of the system. The Greek word for "distress," is *anank[ma]e*, which means "stress," "calamity," or "the means of calamity" (such as torture or violence, as in Lk. 21:23; and 2 Cor. 6:4). Some have suggested this refers to the violent conflict between the new creation in Christ and the world system. When a person becomes a Christian, he immediately gets into some degree of conflict with the ungodly system around him. Paul is saying here, that it is difficult to be a married because of the distress and violence of Satan's evil system.

Persecution is difficult enough for a single person, but the problems and pain are multiplied for one who is married. If Paul had been married, his suffering would have been magnified by his worry about his family and knowledge of their worry about him. They would have suffered every time he was beaten, stoned, and imprisoned and would have been constantly fearful for his life. Who would have taken care of them in his absence? Who would have taught his children and comforted his wife? His suffering and his practical problems would have increased and the effectiveness of his ministry decreased. Married believers who go through social turmoil and persecution cannot escape carrying a much heavier load than those who are single.

2. The Christian's choice

Paul ends verse 26 by stating, "I say, that it is good for a man so to be." Paul is saying, "I hold the conviction that it is good for a man to remain unmarried." He has already stated his conviction concerning singleness in verses 1 and 8 of this chapter.

a) The problem Marriage was a terrible encumbrance to anyone who was a Christian in Paul's time. Because of the impending violence, Christians could expect to receive persecution that would not only effect them, but their families as well. The Corinthian Christians would well remember what the

Corinthian Jews had tried to do to Paul the very time he came to their city. Paul is saying that wholesale persecution will be inevitable. He knew of the heartbreaking losses that could come to those who have a family.b) The prediction Paul was aware of imminent persecution. In the first place Jesus had predicted it. In John 15:18-19 our Lord said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." Jesus had warned the disciples that they would be made outcasts from the synagogue and said, "An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (Jn. 16:2, NASB).c) The persecution Paul seemed to sense the coming terrible Roman persecutions, the first of which would begin under Nero some ten years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Nero refined torture to a diabolical art, and his name became synonymous with sadistic cruelty. He had Christians sewn up in animal skins and thrown before wild dogs to be torn apart and eaten. Other believers were dressed in clothes soaked in wax, tied to trees, and set on fire--becoming human candles for his garden parties (cf. 1 Pe. 4:12). Corinth itself would furnish one of the early Christian martyrs. According to Foxe's Book of Christian Martyrs, Erastus, the treasurer of Corinth (Rom. 16:23) and probably a convert of Paul's, was tortured to death in Philippi.

D. The Absolute (v. 27)

Paul had been talking about those who were unmarried. Now he will address those who were already married. He says, "Art thou bound unto a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife" (v. 27).

1. The married

The apostle Paul gives an absolute command here in verse 27. He is saying if you are already married, do not divorce your spouse. He just said in verse 10, "Let not the wife depart from her husband." Whatever the distress, those who are already married must endure it.

2. The unmarried

For those who have the gift of singleness, it is then much wiser to remain single. Paul says, "Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife" (v. 27). Paul is saying to cherish our singleness as a blessing from God and take advantage of it. Keep in mind that Paul is talking about those who have the gift of singleness. Many might be wondering how this passage applies to today, with the general lack of persecution against Christianity. Many signs point to times of increasing conflict and even persecution for Christians in our world.

In Matthew 24 Jesus vividly pictured the turmoil and terror of the end times. It would be characterized by wars, apostasy, persecution, false prophets, and universal tribulation. We can already see overpopulation, pollution, rampant crime and immorality, as well as false prophets, cults, and increased threats of global war. Paul was right on target when he told Timothy, "Evil men and seducers shall become worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13). The turn of the century could produce widespread warfare, civil strife, revolution, famine, disease, persecution, despotism, natural disasters, economic stagnation, and depression.

Being married will only complicate your life at this time because of the problem of caring for your spouse and children. From the time Jesus first arrived on earth until the day he returns are many pressures that are against the Christian. We are to anticipate suffering and the hatred of the world. If you have the gift of singleness and you don't burn with sexual desire, be content. The nearer you get to the end of time, the higher the price you'll pay for your faith.

II. THE PROBLEMS OF THE FLESH (v. 28)

"But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh; but I spare you."

A. The Problems Identified

Paul again wants to make it clear that it is not a sin for single believers to get married, as long as it is

to another believer (v. 39; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). Even those with the gift of singleness do not sin if they get married. So, if you should marry, for whatever reason, you have not sinned. The point is that marriage is a legitimate option, but it is good to consider first the option of singleness. Paul recognizes that marriage is still the option of the majority according to God's design. But he also recognizes there is the distinct probability that those who do marry will have trouble in this life.

B. The Problems Illustrated

What does Paul mean when he says, "Such shall have trouble in the flesh" (v. 28)? The apostle Paul is giving practical advice, not a moral or spiritual command. He is describing the problems that a married couple will face as believers in Christ.

1. trouble

The Greek word for "trouble," is *thlipsis*, which means "pressed together," or "under pressure." Believers are still sinful and subject to limitations in the flesh. It is hard enough for a sinner to live with himself, let alone with another sinner. That is where the trouble comes from. When two people are bound together in marriage, the problems of human nature are multiplied. Add to that the sinners who will be produced from the parents. Children of Christian parents are born sinful, as is every child, and they do not become sinless when they are saved. They will have some measure of conflict with each other and with their parents.

2. flesh

Paul uses the Greek word *sarx* for "flesh." It refers to the lower nature of man. Even though the Holy Spirit desires perfect unity, our humanness creates problems in the marriage relationship. Marriage involves two distinct people with two distinct personalities, characteristics, emotions, temperaments, and wills. Each partner has some degree of anger, selfishness, dishonesty, pride, forgetfulness, and thoughtlessness. That is true even of the best of marriages. If God has given you the gift of singleness, it is good to stay that way to avoid the problems that our humanness brings into marriage.

Marriage should not be looked upon as merely a way of escape from sexual problems. Loneliness, sexual temptation, lust, and immorality are not eradicated once you've found a marriage partner. In fact, many times, if there have been problems in one's past, simply marrying will not change those problems. Many people carry their loneliness right into marriage, and end up making the other person lonely. And although it is God's design for normal sexual fulfillment, marriage does not end temptation to lust or immorality. If there have been problems with these in the past, the mind may be drawn to illicit fulfillment, many times outside the marriage relationship. Sexual sins will not be corrected by marriage. They may even be worsened by the person who has not correctly dealt with his past problems.

Marriage is not the solution to all problems. It is the solution for only one reason and that is to fulfill the will of God. If He wants you married, then marry the right person. But only if that's clearly God's will. If you are confident you have the gift of singleness, you will avoid the special problems of the flesh that come with marriage, as well as the pressure of the system.

III. THE PASSING OF THE WORLD (vv. 29-31)

"But this I say, brethren, The time is short; it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; And they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away."

A. The Forsaking of Worldly Things

1. The temporary factor

The focal point of this portion of Scripture is verse 31: "The fashion of this world passeth away." Paul is saying that marriage is part of what will pass away with the world. The Greek word for "form" is *sch[ma]* and it refers to "a manner of life, a way of doing things, or mode of existence." Although

God ordained and blessed marriage, it is not an eternal thing (Matt. 22:30). Godly marriages are "made in heaven," but they will not carry over into heaven. Paul is saying marriage is part of what is passing away. Marriage is designed only for this life and will also disappear with this world. This thought bothers many people because they assume that when they marry, they will always be married. But marriage is not an eternal commodity.

2. The time factor

Paul begins verse 29 by saying, "This I say, brethren, The time is short" or, literally "The time has been shortened." The Greek word for "time," is *kairos*, which refers to a fixed, definite period of time. God has set an appointed time for things in this world to be accomplished. The allotted time God has allowed in this world is very brief. James says, "Ye know not what shall be on the next day. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Js. 4:14). Your life is a flickering candle that is gone with the first breath of God's divine wind. First Pater cites Isaiah 40:6-7: "All flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man like the flower of grass" (1:24; cf. James 1:10).

B. The Futility of Worldly Things

Paul gives four examples of the Christian's freedom from attachment to the world in verses 29-31:

1. Marriage

Marriage is a part of the world's passing system. And if you have a gift for singleness, realize that marriage is something you may not want to involve yourself with. It is God's design that we have a light attachment to earthly things. Paul ends verse 29 by saying, "It remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none." Paul is saying that because of the brevity of time, you should above all things concentrate on what is eternal and not temporal. It does not mean you are to neglect your spouse for the sake of the ministry. It does mean, however, that you are to fulfill your responsibilities both to your spouse and the Lord. A brief life and hard circumstances do not lessen the obligations of husbands and wives (cf. Eph. 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19). Paul is teaching that marriage should not reduce a Christian's obligation and devotion to the Lord and His work. Whether you have been gifted for singleness or marriage is not the main issue. Your responsibility is to devote your entire life to the Lord in whatever state you're in. The responsibilities of marriage are no excuse for ignoring the Lord's work. That would invert the priorities.

It has become increasingly difficult for Christians—including missionaries—to be strongly dedicated to serving the Lord. In many cases they do not want to be separated from the companionship of their wives for more than a week or two at most, even though important ministry needs may take more time than that. The primary affections of all Christians, whether married or single, should be set "on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth" (Col. 3:2; NASB). First John 2:15, 17 says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.... And the world passeth away, and the lust of it; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." You can love your wife and at the same time keep your priorities for God in proper perspective.

2. Emotions

Paul deals with the area of human emotions in verse 30: "And they that weep, as though they wept not." Emotions for the most part are not uncontrollable. Christians are not to be emotionless, and certainly not heart-hearted or indifferent. But Christian love is much more than emotion; it is an act of the will. Our emotions should not rise or fall simply as a result of our circumstances. True love will in fact, stabilize our emotions, when it is kept in the proper spiritual perspective. When a relative or loved one dies, becomes handicapped, or diseased, it is not the time to laugh or celebrate. On the other hand, the mature Christian does not lose all hope, purpose, or motivation for living.

The apostle Paul also says, "And they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not" (v. 30). The Christian must also learn not to be carried away with rejoicing over things that will ultimately pass away. Don't become overjoyed with what makes the world happy. Many times our own successes or

accomplishments excite us more than spiritual victory. Even when we give the Lord credit for the blessings we receive, we can easily lose our perspective and be controlled more by our emotions than by good judgement and spiritual priorities.

3. Possessions

Paul also says, "And they that buy, as those they possessed not." The accumulation of money and of the things it can buy is the preoccupation of many Christians. But when that occurs, it is hard to distinguish between them and the world. Paul in effect, is saying, "Be in the world, but not of it." Tie loosely to the world and its relationships, emotions, and commodities. Many times, Christians are more preoccupied with their bank account than their spiritual life. We're more worried about how to decorate our house, or how expensive our cars are than spiritual realities and eternal truths. Christians should be predominately concerned with that which is inward and spiritual rather than that which is outward and material.

4. Pleasure

Paul finishes this list in verse 31: "And they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away." The Scriptures emphasize that the Christian is to promote peace, but many times that is mistaken for pleasure. Especially in times of affluence, permissiveness, and inordinate self-acceptance, it is easy to strive for pleasure rather than peace. This does not mean only those things that are clearly forbidden in Scripture. Pleasures that are not immoral or extravagant in and of themselves may still be worldly--and dangerous to your spiritual life. Inordinate leisure time, early retirement, and more comfortable homes can so dominate our minds that we can begin to neglect the spiritual area of our lives. So many simply live to have a good time rather than giving the glory to God. We can become so busy enjoying things in the world that we disqualify ourselves from any use to Him. We should focus our entire life on those things which have an eternal consequence.

Many have wondered what Paul meant in verse 31 when he said, "And they that use this world, as not abusing it." Paul is encouraging believers not to overdo their identification with the world. Be happy, enjoy your marriage, love your wife, and give of yourselves to one another, but don't let your surroundings become all inclusive. Marriage, sorrow, rejoicing, possessions, and pleasure all have their proper place in the Christian life. But those things become sinful when they dominate our thought and behavior. Don't overvalue earthly things. Keep them in perspective.

Paul's entire point is that it is much easier in this life to remain single. You would not have the preoccupation with marriage and family and consequently you would not have the potential sorrow of the death of a loved one. If you have the gift of singleness, use it for God's glory. If you do not have the gift or are already married, concentrate on spiritual service more so than present earthly pleasure.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What three passages give a good, biblical basis for marriage?
2. Does the Bible give a scriptural basis for singleness? Explain your answer with Scripture.
3. What three basic principles regarding singleness can be found in 1 Corinthians 7?
4. What six reasons does Paul give for remaining single in 1 Corinthians 7:25-40?
5. What is meant by the term "virgin" in verse 25?
6. What was Paul's conviction concerning the issue of singleness?
7. What was the basis for Paul's conviction?
8. Describe what is meant by remaining single because of the pressure of the system?
9. Why is persecution compounded for someone who is married as opposed to someone who isn't?
10. Describe the Roman persecutions under Nero and their result.
11. What was Paul's advice to those who were already married (v. 27)?
12. Explain the potential problems in today's society that would make the decision easier for

remaining single.

13. For the Christian, the _____ you get to the end of time, the _____ the _____ you'll pay for your faith?

14. Describe the second reason Paul gives for remaining single. Why is it hard for two people who are married to live together?

15. True or false: Marriage should be looked upon as a way of escape from sexual problems. Explain your answer.

16. What is the sole reason for marrying?

17. Explain the reason Paul gives in verses 29-31 for remaining single?

18. What four examples does Paul give to explain the Christian's freedom from attachment to the world?

19. Explain the balance between the responsibilities of a person in his marriage and his relationship to God.

20. How is a Christian supposed to deal with his emotions?

21. What is to be the Christian's attitude toward his earthly possessions?

22. Christians should be predominately concerned with that which is _____ and _____ rather than that which is _____ and _____.

23. Are Christians supposed to seek pleasure? Explain your answer.

24. True or false: Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 7:25-31 is that it is much easier in this life to remain single.

25. If you do not have the gift of singleness or are already married, concentrate on _____ more so than _____.

Pondering the Principles

1. In 1 Corinthians 7:25-31, Paul first addressed those who have never been married. His conviction was that they should seriously consider the possibility of remaining single because of the conflict with the world's sinful system. Paul did not lay down an absolute command, but gave an authoritative guideline. Are you presently struggling with your singleness? If you are, would you seriously consider remaining single based on the apostle Paul's strong conviction? With the potential problems facing our world, it may very well be that married believers will go through much more anguish and persecution than those who are single. Ask God to confirm in your heart whether He would rather you be single or married.

2. Paul realized the difficulty of being married to another sinful human being. When two people are bound together in marriage, the problems of our sinful human nature are multiplied. Within marriage, you have two distinct personalities, emotions, temperaments, and wills. As a result, it was the conviction of the apostle Paul that it was better to remain single. As a married person, don't expect things to be perfect just because you and your spouse are Christians. As a single person, realize what is involved in marriage and then ask the Lord for guidance in choosing whether to remain single. Remember, it is not a sin for single believers to be married, as long as it is to another believer. Even those with the gift of singleness do not sin if they get married. The point is that marriage is a legitimate option, but it is good to consider first the option of singleness. Reread the chapter, noting the reasons for remaining single and ask for wisdom. If you are married, seek to walk in obedience and be the best spouse you can be.

3. Paul emphasized that marriage is only for this life and not for eternity. He then gave four examples of temporal things that could lead to an inordinate attachment to the world: marriage, emotions, possessions, and pleasure. How is your spiritual experience in relation to these areas? Do you find yourself more concerned with your wife than Christ? How about your finances? In reality, is your bank account more important than your spiritual life? If so, take each of the four areas: marriage, emotions, possessions, and pleasure and for the next four days, single out one and ask God to

search your heart to reveal the real motives in your thoughts and behavior.

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