

## 1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40

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<sup>25</sup>Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. <sup>26</sup>I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress--that it is good for a man to remain as he is: <sup>27</sup>Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. <sup>28</sup>But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

<sup>29</sup>But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, <sup>30</sup>those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, <sup>31</sup>and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away. <sup>32</sup>But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. <sup>33</sup>But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please his wife. <sup>34</sup>There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please her husband. <sup>35</sup>And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

<sup>36</sup>But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. <sup>37</sup>Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. <sup>38</sup>So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.

<sup>39</sup>A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. <sup>40</sup>But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment--and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

**▪ Some Issues Surrounding Its Interpretation:****~ Command? Advice? What?**

*In verse 25, Paul says that he has no commandment from the Lord on what he is going to say. Instead, he gives his judgment. He says the same in verse 40. And in verse 26, he uses words like "I suppose therefore it is . . ."*

*How are we to understand these 16 verses? Is it God's Word binding on our conscience, or is it just the human advice of Paul? If latter, does it not mean that we can disregard what he said because it is only advice?*

**~ Addressed to whom?**

*The word 'virgins' appear in verses 25, 28, 34, 36-38. Who are they? Some of the answers are: (i) people who are singles, (ii) singles who are engaged (iii) couples who are married but choose not to consummate their marriage.*

*Is Paul talking to the fathers of the single girls in vv36-38?*

**~ Present distress and trouble in the flesh - what are they?**

*Should 'present distress' in verse 26 be translated as 'impending distress' instead? What is it referring to? Famine? Persecution? Return of Jesus?*

*What is 'trouble in the flesh' (v28)? Is it related to what is said in verse 26, and if so, how?*

**~ Is married life inferior to singlehood?**

*How should we understand verses 32-34? Is Paul implying that singlehood is superior to marriage? If so, how does that square with his statement earlier in verse 7 that it is a gift from God?*

**~ What is 'past the flower of youth' (*hyperakmos*)?**

*Is Paul using this term in reference to the single girls, or single men? What is the meaning of 'behaving improperly towards his virgin'? Is he talking about the male single towards his girl-friend, or the father towards his daughter?*

- **Verse 25** ~ *Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.*

**Virgins:** *The word in Greek is 'parthenos' meaning 'a maiden', 'an unmarried daughter'. It was the word used of Mary the mother of Jesus while she was betrothed to Joseph and before she was married to him. In verse 28 the possibility of marriage is held out for virgins (that is they have not yet entered into marriage). In verse 34 virgins are contrasted with wives (that is they are not in the state of marriage). This word was not used for 'widows' in verse 8. Hence 'parthenos' must be talking about never-before-married ladies (not wives, not those divorced and not widows), a subset of those who may be single/unmarried currently.*

*The entire 16 verses discuss the issue of marriage. It appears that 'virgins' are contemplating this issue, and deciding if they should marry or not. Paul is found to be giving his judgment on this matter throughout the entire passage. In verse 27, words like bound and loosed are used. Since the decision before the virgins is 'marry or not', implying they are not yet married, verse 27 cannot be talking about divorce. But the words 'bound' and 'loose' does convey contractual obligations. Hence it is very likely that Paul is talking to virgins (never-before-married girls) who are betrothed/engaged.*

**Judgment:** *The word in Greek is 'gnome', which could be translated as opinion or counsel. The NJKV translates it as judgment. Paul says that he is giving his 'gnome', for he has no command from the Lord on this matter. This 'no command from the Lord' could mean that the Lord Jesus did not address this matter while He was here on earth. It is true, and in this sense, it would be like what he has said in verse 12. The Lord did not give a command on this, but now as Christ's apostle, I am going to give one in His Name. Is this the meaning here in verse 25?*

*Another way of understanding this phrase is that in this area of whether betrothed couples should proceed with marriage, there is no command from the Lord. In other words, God did not say 'Yes, proceed' or 'No, don't proceed'. He gives us the liberty to choose, to make our decisions if we are in that state. As the couples concerned*

*are struggling with the decision, Christ through Paul gave them counsel. In the light of the situation, knowing that this decision is likely to lead to this consequence while that decision is likely to lead to that consequence, bearing in mind this principle and that principle, it would be prudent to choose this. The counsel is given for your good (verse 35) and to help you come to a state of no anxiety (v32). But the choice is yours to make and know that whatever decision you made, there is no sin involved (v28, 38).*

*So, pertaining to the question at hand, no legislation is given, only counsel. However, the underlying principles stated to guide your decision, they are divine principles and hence not to be rejected.*

▪ **Verse 26-28**

**What's the counsel?**

*This is Paul's overall counsel: Remain as you are. This means, if you are engaged to be married, don't break the engagement. If you are not engaged, don't seek it. In other words, if you are single, remain single. But if you choose to marry, that's perfectly fine! There's no sin involved in this decision of yours!*

**Why this counsel?**

*Paul's counsel here is motivated by the 'present distress' and because of the 'present distress', those who are married will have trouble in the flesh. Paul wants to spare the Corinthian believers of this trouble in the flesh, and this is why he gave the counsel that he did.*

*The word 'enistemi' can be translated as 'present' or 'impending'. However, throughout the New Testament, Paul used it as 'present' (Romans 8:38, Galatians 1:4, 1 Corinthians 3:22) and hence it should be translated as 'present' here. So Paul is saying that in the light of this present/current distress, it is prudent to abstain from marriage. This present distress will only result in 'troubles in the flesh' for those who are married.*

*What exactly is this 'present distress'? Is it a famine? Is it persecution? We cannot be sure, though we can know that it must be of such a magnitude, its effect so great, that to spare these believers of 'troubles in the flesh', Paul counsels them to abstain from marriage.*

- Verse 29-35

These 7 verses can be sub-divided into two parts, each with a main point that Paul wants to convey: verses 29-31 and verses 32-35.

Verses 29-31

*<sup>29</sup>But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on*

*even those who have wives should be as though they had none,*

*<sup>30</sup>those who weep as though they did not weep,*

*those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice,*

*those who buy as though they did not possess,*

*<sup>31</sup>and those who use this world as not misusing it.*

*For the form of this world is passing away.*

*The word 'brethren' points to the fact that here he is widening his focus. He is not just addressing the virgins in the hearing of the entire church, but he is now involving everyone in what he wants to say. The main point that he wants to convey here has relevance for everyone, not just the virgins.*

*His main point has to do with "the time is short" and "the form of this world is passing away". The latter phrase is clear as apostle John has used the same phrase in 1 John 2:17. So clearly, what Paul is going to say has to do with this world being only temporal and that a day will come when it will be gone. We note that he did not say this world will one day pass away but it is passing away. In other words, it has already started!*

*What does "the time is short" mean? The word 'short' is 'sustello' in Greek and besides this verse here, it is used only in Acts 5:6 ~ "And the young man arose and wrapped him up, carried him out and buried him." So we can translate it as "the time is wrapped up". Some English Bible translates it as "shortened" or "compressed" rather than "short". What does it mean that the time has been shortened, or compressed?*

*As Christians, we know the end. The end may be a long way from today, or it may be tomorrow, but that's not the point. The point is that we know the end because the time has been compressed, shortened, brought to our view. We know that this world is temporal and it will all be burnt up. We know that this world is going to pass away. We can see this clearly and hence we know very clearly what is important and what is not, what matters and what doesn't. Hence we ought to live in that knowledge.*

*How would someone who knows "the time is short" and "the form of this world is passing away" live? Paul gives five illustrations of "as if nots". They appear absurd and even contradictory to what he has taught elsewhere, if we are to take it literally. But they are not meant to be taken literally, but as rhetoric, to convey a message.*

- (i) Marriage. Paul is not calling upon husbands to be celibate or neglect their wives. If he is, then he would be contradicting what he has taught in vv3-5 and Ephesians 5:25ff where he calls the husband to love the wife. He is saying that while we enjoy our marriage, yet we must remember that marriage is only for this life. Death will break its bond and there will be no marriage in heaven. So we must not live our lives defined by marriage, but by Christ.*
- (ii) Weeping and rejoicing. Paul himself does weep and he does rejoice. So he is not calling us to have not emotions. Indeed, life in this world will have its fair share of weeping and rejoicing. But he is saying that while we grieve, and while we rejoice, we must not allow these to determine, control, define us. Our grief and joy are normally over the things of this world and this world is passing away.*
- (iii) Buy. Is Paul forbidding us from shopping and trading? No, but he is saying that as we do so, and we must while living in this world, these things do not and must not possess us. We may consume but we must watch it lest we become consumed by our consuming. We must avoid inordinate love for the things of this world.*

*(iv) Use the world. Make full use of it. But don't get al caught up with it. Like Paul, he can make use of his privilege, but at certain times, he chose not to use his rights because there is a higher concern governing him.*

*What is the message? Live in this world, marry and cry and laugh and buy and use, but do not be conformed to this world. Do not let your life be determined by these things. Do not become obsessed with these things. Rather, our life now is to be determined by Christ, by our identity in Christ and our future in Christ.*

### Verses 32-35

The New King James Version has it as:

*<sup>32</sup>But I want you to be without care.*

*He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord--how he may please the Lord. <sup>33</sup>But he who is married cares about the things of the world--how he may please his wife.*

*<sup>34</sup>There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world--how she may please her husband.*

*<sup>35</sup>And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.*

The English Standard Version has it as:

*<sup>32</sup>I want you to be e free from anxieties.*

*The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. <sup>33</sup>But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, <sup>34</sup>and his interests are divided.*

*And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.*

*<sup>35</sup>I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*

- **Who is the 'you'?**  
*The 'you' is likely to be the betrothed couples. Paul's desire is that they be in the state of 'no anxiety'.*
- **Who is anxious for what?**  
*The unmarried are anxious about the things of the Lord while the married are anxious for the things of the world, how they may please their spouse.*

*There is certainly a contrast here between the lives of the two groups of people. Is the contrast one of superior versus inferior, or simply how things will turn out to be?*

*More questions:*

*(a) The unmarried cares for the things of the Lord. Is that always true? Do we find some unmarried people (believers) who do not care for the things of the Lord, but for the things of the world?*

*(b) By saying that the married cares for the things of the world, is Paul saying that they don't care for the things of the Lord? Are the two mutually exclusive?*

*(c) Are the married people sinning by caring for the things of the world, how they may please their spouse?*

*The answer to all three questions above can be 'No'. Unmarried people do not always only care for the things of the Lord. They should, but they may not! The married can care for both the things of the Lord and the things of the world. And it is no sin for them to care for the things of the world, to please their spouse.*

- **What then is the issue?**

*The ESV has "his interests are divided" (v34). And in verse 35, Paul states that one of his concerns is that believers have undivided devotion to the Lord (able to serve the Lord without distraction).*

*The reasoning used by Paul here appears to be as follows:*

*Major premise: Less anxiety about externals increase undivided devotion to the Lord.*

*Minor premise: Unmarried person has less anxiety about externals.*

*Conclusion: Unmarried person has more opportunity to give undivided devotion to the Lord.*

*Paul's main concern is that believers are able to serve the Lord as best as they can. Hence, he recommends remaining single since that would put you in the position of being able to serve your Lord with as much time as you can get, to do so with undivided devotion.*

*However, Paul is quick to clarify that this is recommended, not to put a leash on them, but only for their profit, for what is proper, that they may serve the Lord without distraction.*

- **Verse 36-38**

*In verse 36, the brother decides to proceed with marriage, Paul assures him that he has not sinned. The reason for his decision is that he finds himself behaving improperly towards his virgin (meaning towards his betrothed). This could mean that he does strongly desire to marry, showing that he has not been given the gift of being single. In such case, proceed with the marriage.*

*In verse 37, we have another brother who decides in the opposite direction. Paul commends him for it. But make sure it is a decision that he is not forced to take but one that he have thought through, resolved and made freely.*

*Verse 38 sums up his point. If you marry, it is no sin. It is good. If you remain single, it is commendable because of the current situation.*

**▪ Verse 39-40**

*Paul gives the same counsel concerning widows considering remarriage. He states that the spouse must be in the Lord. Other than this criteria, she is free to decide if she wants to remarry or not. His own personal recommendation is to remain as single.*

**CONCLUSION**

*Overall, Paul tells the Christians @ Corinth that the basic posture should be to remain as they are. In whatever state you find yourself in, unless it is sinful, you can live your Christian Life there. There is no need to change or the belief that a change in life's externals will make you holier.*

*Living in this world, we must not be obsessed with this world. We must always fix our eyes on eternity, and our overall aim in life should be to please the Lord, to serve Him. So choose what is most advantageous and helpful to that end, when the choice is in the area of Christian Liberty.*