

“Concerning” Marriage: “The Time Is Short”

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

The principle behind this portion of the text on marriage is that our time to make an impact on those around us, and on this world, is short (is “shortened” – running out), and we need to do all we can in our service for the Lord while we have time.

I. A TIME OF DISTRESS – VS. 25-29A

A. There is no real, viable debate on whether we are in distress in this present world – the fact is very clear – we are in much distress. Not only from the enemy without, and all the social upheaval abounding around us, but from the enemy “within” – within the church as it attempts to accomplish the Great Commission. It is that distress that the Apostle has in mind when he writes this discourse to the Corinthian believers.

B. Distress that necessitates directed focus – vs. 25-26

1. “Now concerning virgins”

a) It would appear that this was a related question that the church in Corinth asked in their letter for which the Apostle Paul provided answers. He continues on with the subject of marriage and continues on with the context of verse 16.

- b) The use of the word "virgins" is most often considered to be anyone unmarried (male or female).
- c) Considering the context here, I think it's more specific to women than to men – especially considering its use in verse 36.
- d) Some consider it to be "virgin daughters" – from the viewpoint of the father. In the culture of the times that this letter was written it was common practice for the father to arrange the marriage without any real input from the child. In that setting, the father controlled, for the most part, the espousal and marriage of his daughter and she would have simply been referred to as his "virgin" until the wedding night.

"Verses 1 Cor.7:25-28 in this passage were written in response to a specific question 'concerning virgins.' While several possible interpretations have been given as to what virgin Paul refers to, it probably refers either to a father or guardian of an unmarried daughter, or to a man who was betrothed to a virgin but whose marriage had not yet been consummated."
(Preacher's Commentary)

- 2. "I have no commandment of the Lord" – we dealt with this in verses 10 and 12 earlier in this chapter. It's not saying Paul wasn't under inspiration – it just means that there was nothing that Jesus had said or taught that was recorded for him to use as a commandment.
- 3. "Yet I give my judgement" – the word for "judgment" (γνώμη) deals with the idea of discernment based on knowledge and

experience. Some versions translate it "opinion," which gives a good sense, but it was not opinion as we think of it but an opinion that was based on his knowledge of the Word of God and his experience from ministry, as well as the knowledge he received from the Holy Spirit to be in a position to impart his "judgment" (or, opinion, if you would).

4. "As one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful"
 - a) This is why we can be confident that the "judgment" he was giving was inspired of the Lord – this was his justification or proof that what he was giving was truth.
 - b) Our ability to be faithful comes from the Lord – it is a mercy of the Lord that enables us to be faithful, not the other way around.
5. Vs. 26 – "I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress"
 - a) "Therefore" – because he had obtained mercy to give this view of marriage and service to the Lord
 - b) "This" – what he is about to say, not what he has said – "that it is good for a man so to be" (unmarried, as he was).
 - c) "Is good for the present distress" – "For the necessity which the saints are daily subject to, who are continually tossed up and down, so that their estate may seem most unfit for marriage, were it not that the weakness of the flesh forced them to it."

(1) "Present" – to stand, or standing on (or

in) – the world that exists at any given point in time as it relates to the believer. "There was no period in the heathen times when the Church was not under persecutions and afflictions; on some occasions these were more oppressive than at others" (Adam Clarke).

Galatians 1:4

⁴ Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this **present** evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

Hebrews 9:9

⁹ Which was a figure for the time then **present**, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

(2) *"Distress" - necessity, imposed either by the circumstances, or by law of duty regarding to one's advantage, custom, argument (Outline of Biblical Usage from studylight.org).*

Another view: "On account of the pressing necessity" (Pulpit Commentary).

d) "That it is good for a man so to be"

(1) *I believe this is speaking specifically to the male gender (considering the next verse) and is speaking in a fairly direct way to the leadership of the church at Corinth. They had lost sight of the real purpose of their lives as it related to serving the Lord with focus and direction and were more concerned*

about sensual pleasures. This was another case of the Apostle Paul directing their attention away from those worldly pleasures.

- (2) *The words "so to be" can mean either the way he (Paul) was as unmarried, or as they were – whether married or unmarried. Either one fits, but, considering the next verse (and the previous text prior to the parenthetical) it would seem that he had the later in mind – in whatever state they were in (the Greek word εἶμι or εἶναι meaning "to be," or "to exist") they were to stay focused on the work of Christ.*

"I think therefore that this is good by reason of the distress that is upon us, namely, that it is good for a man to be as he is." (Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible)

C. Distress that necessitates undisturbed focus – vs. 27-29a

1. Vs. 27 is fairly straightforward and is associated with the previous phrase of verse 26. It's also pointing back to the previous text in this letter that dealt with the issue of remaining married unless the unbelieving departs. For the purpose of undisturbed focus in one's service to the Lord, there should be no desire to change status. The church had asked the question should they separate from their spouses to serve better and Paul is saying, again, no – stay married. He also expounds and says if not married stay unmarried. In other words, stay focused.

2. Vs. 28 – “But and if thou marry” – the “thou” is pointing specifically to the man.
3. “Thou hast not sinned – the answer to their question.
4. “And if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned” – the burden for servitude, whether single or married, is placed evenly on both man and woman – in whatever social status they have, they are not living in sin in either case (again, in answer to a question that was asked).
5. “Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh”
 - a) “Nevertheless” – even if one hasn’t sinned in getting married, as the Apostle saw it, and as he taught (by inspiration of the Holy Spirit), to be married would mean there would be trouble not otherwise there in an unmarried person’s life.
 - b) “Such” – those that got married (this goes back to verse 9 where it states, “it is better to marry than to burn.” There are times when it is simply better to be married, even knowing that will bring a different dynamic to life.
 - c) “Shall have trouble” – there are two parts to this issue:
 - (1) *First is the right interpretation within the historical/contextual value – Matthew Henry puts this in perspective: “Christians, at the first planting of their religion, were grievously persecuted. Their enemies were very bitter against them, and treated them very cruelly.*

They were continually liable to be tossed and hurried by persecution. This being the then state of things, he did not think it so advisable for Christians that were single to change conditions. The married state would bring more care and cumber along with it (1Co_15:33, 1Co_15:34), and would therefore make persecution more terrible, and render them less able to bear it. Note, Christians, in regulating their conduct, should not barely consider what is lawful in itself, but what may be expedient for them."

(2) *Second is that of application and putting this into our time today – having a spouse, raising a family, brings much care and concern, and rightfully so (according to Scripture). Paul is not saying here that you can't serve the Lord and be married. He is simply stating the obvious – if married there is a lot more trouble involved.*

(3) *The word for "trouble" is also translated "tribulation" and means to compress or squeeze, as in a very narrow place without the ability to turn around; pressure from all sides.*

John 16:33

33 **These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.**

2 Corinthians 1:4

4 **Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any**

trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Romans 5:1-5

¹ Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

² By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

³ And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

⁴ And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

⁵ And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

d) "In the flesh" – "By the "flesh" he understands whatever things belong to this present life, for marriage brings with it many problems. So that he leans more to a single life, not because it is a service more agreeable to God than marriage is, but for those problems which (if it were possible) he would wish all men to be avoid, so that they might give themselves to God alone." (Geneva Bible comments)

e) "But I spare you" – or, "and I would spare you" – "I would your weakness were provided for" (Geneva Bible comments).

6. Vs. 29a – "But this I say, brethren, the time is short."

a) "But this I say" – the word for "say" (φημι)

is one that means to bring to light by speech (rather than just referring to words as the word "logos" does). Strong says of this: "to show or make known one's thoughts." Paul wanted to make sure this was something that he made known – that it was something that was imbedded deep in his thoughts on the issue of service.

b) "The time is short"

(1) *Alford: ὁ καιρ. συνεστ. ἐστ. τὸ λοιπὸν]*
The time that remains is short; lit., 'the time is shortened henceforth:'—i.e. the interval between now and the coming of the Lord has arrived at an extremely contracted period. (Alford) – Rom. 13.11; Eph. 5.16

Romans 13:11–13

11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

Ephesians 5:16

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

(2) *This word for "short" is only used one other time in the New Testament and that appears in Acts 5:6 in relation to the account of Ananias and Sapphira's*

death. It is translated "wound him up," speaking of the burial shroud they would wrap tightly around the body for burial. The word has the idea of contraction, to shrink.

(3) In relation to the context, the idea of time being short is that, because of the distress man is in in this life (as was the case with the believers in Corinth as well), the time we are in is full of distress and is hastening on quickly because of it.

(4) Wesley says this: But this I say, brethren - With great confidence. The time of our abode here is short. It plainly follows, that even they who have wives be as serious, zealous, active, dead to the world, as devoted to God, as holy in all manner of conversation, as if they had none - By so easy a transition does the apostle slide from every thing else to the one thing needful; and, forgetting whatever is temporal, is swallowed up in eternity. (Wesley)

To illustrate the point: A Chinese preacher, wishing to impress upon his hearers the idea that time seems to pass more swiftly as we get older, used a telling illustration drawn from the incense-pan. The incense-pan is an article of furniture familiar to every Chinaman, young and old. It is a stand made to hold a great length of incense, coiled up like a clock-spring. The outer coils are by far the largest, the outermost being fifteen or eighteen inches in circumference; while the inner coils get gradually shorter, the innermost of all not being more than, perhaps, three inches in

circumference. This spiral incense being fixed on the frame and lighted, the first round takes a long time to burn; the second round, being shorter, is completed quicker; the third round is completed more quickly still; and so, with accelerated pace, the smoking point courses round the shortening coils till the last is reached, which, being the shortest of all, is travelled round in a fraction of the time that was taken to consume the first. In the same way, said the Chinaman, our years seem to go, flying more swiftly the nearer we get to the end of our life. (Biblical Illustrator)

Conclusion to this point: Whatever we do for the Lord in our service to Him needs to be done with a sense of urgency. We need to understand that it is a time of distress, a time of trouble, a time that we will soon be out of, and if we don't work now, while it is day, the night will be upon us when there will be no more time to work.

II. A TIME TO MAKE PROPER DECISIONS – VS. 29B-34

A. If there is ever a time when the believer needs to be aware of the decisions they make, it is now. In two aspects: one, in that we are not getting any younger; and two, the time of this world is short – time is running out on this age.

III. A TIME TO BE WITHOUT DISTRACTIONS – VS. 35-40