

THE QUESTION CONCERNING MARRIAGE: SHOULD CHRISTIAN VIRGINS AND WIDOWS MARRY?

1 CORINTHIANS 07:25–40

Introduction

Falling in love and growing in love are natural experiences of human life. It is normal for men and women to desire to spend their lives together. However, there are times when a couple should not marry, and there is a better alternative for some persons. This passage discusses the question of Christian singles and widows: should they marry? The Corinthian church had written Paul and asked him about this matter.

- I. This passage is a judgment of Paul's, not a direct commandment of the Lord (v. 25).
- II. Concern 1: consider the “present crisis” of the world (vv. 26-28).
- III. Concern 2: know the time is short (vv. 29-31).
- IV. Concern 3: be without anxiety and distressing care (v. 32-34).
- V. Concern 4: give undivided devotion to the Lord (v. 35).
- VI. Conclusion: in light of the present crisis several instructions are advisable (vv. 36-40).

I. 1 Corinthians 07:25 Paul's Inspiration

This Scripture is a judgment of Paul's, not a commandment of the Lord. This is essential to note, for Paul says clearly that the Lord did not give a direct commandment governing this matter. However he, Paul, would give his judgment...

- because he had obtained the mercy of the Lord. The Lord was with him, and he knew the intimacy and presence of the Lord and of His will.
- because he was called to be faithful to the Lord, and he would be faithful in giving his judgment and instructions.

Note one other fact. The word “virgin” usually refers only to women; however the word is sometimes used to refer to both women and men (cp. Rev. 14:4). Paul is apparently using the word to refer to both sexes in this passage.

II. 1 Corinthians 07:26–28 The Present Crisis of the World

The first concern is the “present crisis” of the world. The Corinthians were facing some terrible and pressuring crisis. What was it? We do not know, but it was probably the threat and antagonism of severe persecution from a hostile world. The persecutions were either already existing or else Paul sensed them lying right over the horizon.

Whatever the crisis was, it was a heavy strain upon the believers. The word “crisis” (anagke) is a strong word referring to calamities. It is the word that is used to describe the

woes surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus. It is also the very same word Paul used to describe his own persecutions (1 Th. 3:7; 2 Cor. 6:4; 12:10). In light of the present crisis, Paul says two things.

1. First, his judgment is for believers to stay in their present marital state. If a believer is single, remain single. If a believer is married, of course, be faithful to your marriage bond. Do not flee and desert your family, saving your own life and leaving them to bear the crisis alone (v. 26-27).
 2. Second, marriage is normal; it is not a sin if the couple goes ahead and marries. But note these facts if there is crisis in the world.
- => The married couple will have more problems and more trouble to face. Marriage adds more responsibility and additional care. It involves another life to consider in making critical decisions, and critical decisions always arise in distressful situations.

Thought 1. There have never been many places in this world where professing Christians could worship the Lord Jesus Christ without reactions and threats from a hostile world. Even today practically every place on the earth witnesses the persecution of genuine believers. They are often ridiculed, mocked, cursed, abused and sometimes threatened with violence and death for their testimony. Few places, if any, are completely free from some form of persecution.

Therefore, if a genuine believer is considering marriage, he or she must consider the loved one's commitment to Christ. Will the loved one take a stand for Christ and bear witness to a hostile world, a world that wants no restraint upon its behaviour, no message that proclaims righteousness and godliness, holiness and purity, honesty and commitment, soberness and morality? The genuine believer should always consider other calamities as well: war, disease, handicaps, economic hardship, and a host of other possible difficulties. The believer must make absolutely sure that he and his spouse desire to suffer together through whatever crisis exists or is threatened. They must also make sure they are willing to suffer together *in Christ*, not weakening and deserting either Christ or each other.

Gen 2:24 *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

1 Cor 7:10 *To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband.*

Eph 5:22 *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*

1 Pet 3:7 *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

III. *1 Corinthians 07:29–31 Time is Short*

The second concern is to know that time is short. This is a reference to both the brevity of life and to the return of the Lord. No believer knows when he will be called upon to face the Lord either through death or through the Lord's return. Any one of us may be taken today by accident or by some unknown disease, and the Lord could certainly choose to return today. Therefore, two attitudes are extremely wise for us to adopt.

1. The attitude of being detached from earthly circumstances.

=> If we have a spouse, we need to live as though we do not have him or her, for we may not by nightfall.

=> If we weep, we need to live as though the weeping experience is over, for it may be by nightfall.

=> If we rejoice, we need to live as though the joyful experience is over, for it may be by nightfall.

=> If we buy some item today, we need to live as though we do not possess it, for we may not by nightfall.

Rom 13:11-12 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber; because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

1 Cor 7:29 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none.

Eph 5:16 Making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Col 4:5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

James 1:10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.

James 4:14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

1 Pet 1:24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall."

1 Chr 29:15 We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.

Job 7:6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and they come to an end without hope."

Psa 39:5 You have made my days a mere hand-breadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath.

Psa 49:12 *But man, despite his riches, does not endure: he is like the beasts that perish.*

Psa 78:39 *He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.*

Psa 103:14-16 *For he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.*

Isa 51:12 *“I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass.”*

2. The attitude of not over-using the world nor of being engrossed in the world, for it passes away. It can be stated no more clearly or forcefully: the world is passing away. Note the word form (shema) is used; it is a word taken from the theatre. The world is nothing more than the passing scenes of a film that will soon end. The world is destined to end in its present form. The present state of things will cease just as the scenes of a film cease. The believer must keep this in mind; he must not live for the passing form of this world. He must live for eternity, keeping before his mind that time is short, ever so short.

Rom 12:2 *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

Gal 6:14 *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

2 Tim 2:3-4 *Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

IV. 1 Corinthians 07:32–34 Marriage and Anxiety

The third concern is to without anxiety and distressing care. Remember that Paul is talking to genuine believers, believers who honestly love the Lord and diligently serve Him. Very simply...

- the unmarried Christian is more likely to be anxious for the Lord, how he may please the Lord; whereas the married man is more likely to be anxious for his wife, how he may please her.

- the unmarried woman is more likely to be anxious for the Lord, how she may be holy both in body and spirit; whereas the married woman cares for the things of her husband, how she may please him.

This is a natural and understandable result of marriage that Christian couples must consider when they desire to be married. They are giving up their rights to live single lives, the privilege of only having to care and look after themselves. Once they are married, they are responsible for the care of their spouse. They must think about and actually please the other.

***Luke 10:40** But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”*

***1 Cor 7:33** But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world — how he can please his wife.*

***1 Tim 5:8** If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

V. 1 Corinthians 07:35 Undivided Devotion to the Lord

The fourth concern is to give undivided devotion to the Lord. Note: Paul re-emphasizes that he is speaking for the believers’ “own good,” that is, for their welfare and advantage. He is not trying to cast a snare or undue restraints upon them. He has no reason to restrict their liberty to marry. They could marry if they wished, for he was interested only in telling them what is “right,” that is, proper and orderly. They need to know what would bring the best order to their lives. The one thing they needed to guard against was walking into marriage unprepared, not knowing and not having given thought to what is involved in marriage.

There is another reason for remaining single, a reason that is most advantageous, a supreme reason that every believer should consider: the single believer can “live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.” He can devote his life to the Lord without the divided attention that a wife and family necessitates.

***Rom 12:1-2** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

***2 Cor 10:5** We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

***Phil 3:7-8** But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of*

knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

Phil 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*

1 Th 5:23 *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Thought 1. A believer must keep in mind that celibacy is a gift of God. (See notes, 1 Cor. 7:1; 7:7.)

VI. 1 Corinthians 07: 36–40 Marriage, Instructions

The conclusions concerning the questions about marriage are clearly stated.

1. Christian virgins (both men and women) are free to marry if necessary, that is, if they are not called by God to remain single. Note that in Paul's day the father was the one who was responsible for the marriage of the child. Therefore, the reference to anyone in this verse is to the father. He and his wife, the parents of the young person desiring to be married, were vitally involved in the marriage. (What a need today! How fewer divorces would there be if a family carried the matter of dating, engagement and marriage together before Christ?)
2. The Christian who is called of God and given the discipline to control his passion should remain single, devoting his or her life solely to the Lord.
3. The Christian father who gives his daughter in marriage does well, but the Christian father who encourages his *God-called* virgin daughter (or son) to devote her whole life to the Lord does better.

Thought 1. No father should encourage or do this unless he knows beyond question that the child is called of God. He is only encouraging trouble for this child unless the child is truly called of God. For this reason both parent and child must be absolutely sure of God's call.

4. The contract of marriage is for life. There is to be no exception (cp. Rom. 7:1-3).
5. The Christian widower or widow is to consider two things when thinking about marriage.
 - a. He or she is to marry only a Christian.
 - b. He or she is more blessed to remain single. He or she will probably be happier remaining single. ■