

1Corinthians 7:25-31 "Using The Time Wisely"

1 Corinthians 7:25-31 ²⁵ Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. ²⁹ But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; ³⁰ and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; ³¹ and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

Keep in mind that Paul is still addressing questions these Corinthian believers had written to him.

1CO 7:1 "Now for the matters you wrote about: ..."

And then he goes on to address each one, starting with marriage and some of the details of how to live in that relationship to the glory of God. He even gives them instructions on how a believer should live with an unbelieving mate, and even what to do if that unbeliever wants to get a divorce; namely let them go.

But if the unbeliever wants to stay they must stay together, and then he explains how that unbelieving mate, together with the children, are sanctified through the believer in the sense that they are set apart by God to see and witness the new life the believing mate has in Christ.

He also instructs the rest of the believers to stay in the state in which Christ called them and be a witness in life right where they are, be that as a slave or free man.

If God opens a door for a change, as in the case of the slave to become free, then by all means make the change, but still represent Christ in that new situation.

And then Paul moves to a group of people he hasn't directly addressed until now in our text.

1CO 7:25 "Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."

Paul begins by stating that as our Lord had taught on subjects like marriage and divorce between two believers, in contrast He did not specifically teach, during His earthly ministry, on things like the relationship of a couple where one of the two becomes a believer and the other one doesn't.

Remember, this is precisely what he meant when he said, "To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her." (1CO 7:12)

And in like manner he is again saying the same thing as it relates to what Jesus had previously taught when he was with his disciples, which evidently didn't include specific instructions to virgins as it relates to marriage in difficult times.

And so, when Paul says in verse 25 that he has no command from the Lord he doesn't mean to suggest that he's just making this stuff up. He's still writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as God speaks to the church. And so he continues: "...I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."

In some of your translations it reads: "I give an opinion..." The point he's trying to make is that what he is about to share is simply good godly counsel under the circumstances. It's not binding, it's just practical information.

And Paul adds that this counsel is coming from one who has been found trustworthy in all other areas of service to the Lord. He's been found trustworthy in advancing the kingdom of Christ through the gospel. He's been found trustworthy to be a living witness as his life demonstrates he is a new creature in Christ.

He's been found trustworthy to expose falsehood and false teaching while at the same time teaching the very word of God in a trustworthy way as God is his witness. And so, even if this counsel isn't binding it doesn't mean it is any less godly because this very counsel is actually coming from God Himself through Paul.

So what's the counsel?

1CO 7:26-27 "Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife."

It seems that this advice from Paul is predicated on something that was going on in the area of Corinth at this time in history. Paul refers to it as a present crisis. The NASB and NKJV refers to it as a present distress.

It was an impending difficulty which some have speculated to possibly be a couple of things: Either persecution which was taking place in the area because of their faith in Christ, or a famine which was taking place in this area of the world at that time.

Either of these reasons might have led Paul to have these young people consider holding off on their marriage plans. Under such extreme difficulties it could put a real strain on their ability to carry out their responsibilities to be the husband or wife God wants them to be.

But it could also be a real hindrance for them to carry on in serving the Lord in the church there in Corinth.

Now, we do know that there were persecutions taking place in that area of the world. Remember that when Paul first went to Corinth to share the gospel he met with a great deal of opposition from the Jews; so much so that he was genuinely fearing for his life which is why the Lord gave him an encouragement.

ACT 18:9-10 "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. 10 For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

He may have feared that some of this same opposition was still fermenting in that area and that this could lead to all sorts of persecution. Under those circumstances it was probably not a good idea for a virgin, and by implication a young person, to get married at that time.

But Paul doesn't have just a word to virgins. He addresses the rest of the body to consider the relationships they're already in and not to use difficult times to get out of those relationships.

1CO 7:27 "Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife."

This is essentially what Paul just got through saying in 1CO 7:24. "Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to."

Stay where you are and concentrate on your relationship with Christ. Don't go making panic decisions or hasty decisions until things calm down. It's like trying to make major decisions just after someone in your family has died. Sometimes you're forced to, but there are good chances that you're not in your best frame of mind for making such decisions.

But suppose you look at the circumstances of life and you recognize that they're difficult in your present situation but you're willing to make a decision in spite of counsel to the contrary. Suppose that a young Christian college student meets a Christian girl and they fall in love and decide to get married.

Now what do you do with the counsel Paul has given? Or suppose one of the virgins Paul addresses in this letter decides that they don't want to remain single. After having read this letter from Paul, what should they do? Well, they can take this godly counsel or they can choose not to take the counsel without fear of sinning.

1CO 7:28 "But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this."

Here Paul speaks as a pastor concerned with the welfare of this flock in Corinth. He knows God's teaching on marriage and that it is a good thing for a man to leave his mother and father and cleave to his wife. He knows that marriage was instituted by God Himself.

This is why we know Paul is not talking about making a moral decision. It is not more holy to stay single under the circumstances Paul addresses here. It's simply a practical consideration. And the practicality of it here in our text has to do with this "present distress."

Paul says, from a practical standpoint as it relates to this present distress, "...those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this."

How many times has a father or mother said to their children, not to pursue a particular path knowing that it will lead to hardship? And how many times has a child said to his or her parents, but I

feel I need to do this at this time? I want to discover this on my own.

I can remember when I told my parents that I was going to back pack around the country by myself. I was still living home getting ready to move out and go to college. I had just turned 20. Both my mom and dad tried to talk me out of it. The idea that a young kid was going to hitch hike around the country didn't sit well with them.

It just didn't seem wise at the time to them. The early 70's were crazy times. People were rioting in the streets, protesting the war in Vietnam. There were the Charles Manson murders and drugs galore. I knew all of this, but I told them that I just have to do this despite recognizing these problems.

And Paul recognizes that despite trying to spare them any hardships he knows that people will still decide not to take his counsel. And keep in mind here that the particular counsel he's talking about is not whether one chooses sin or not, but a choice in life which is neutral from a moral standpoint, but from a practical standpoint may have certain ramifications.

But to strengthen his case and to demonstrate his zeal for them to remain as they are he writes something which might appear to be a bit bizarre, until closer examination.

1CO 7:29=31 "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."

What does Paul mean by this? Does he actually mean to suggest, for example, that if you have a wife that you should live as though you're single? That would go over great with your wife. Or that you should consider being celibate or getting a divorce?

He just spoke on those things. Of course he doesn't mean to suggest that.

Does he mean to suggest that if you mourn the death of a loved one that you should turn off those emotions and not mourn at all? Or if you're happy you should walk around with a gloomy face?

What Paul is utilizing here is a form of poetry to frame his premise that there is not much time in life to accomplish those things for God and we should take every opportunity to maximize our ability to love and serve the Lord.

This is really what's he's trying to say. Look at verse 29 and then go down to verse 31. Notice that he begins 29 by saying, "the time is short." He ends verse 31 with, "this world in its present form is passing away."

Everything in between is meant to be taken in that light. Nothing in this world has any permanence. Life is short. There is a definite time in which all will pass away; either by history unfolding with the ultimate destruction of this world by fire as Christ returns for us, or by our own death.

He wants us to frame life from an eternal perspective. And he uses a poetic way of doing it. Notice he addresses all the major aspects of life. Marriage, emotions, buying and selling which suggests the necessities of life including the luxuries. Using the things of this world which suggests that they were meant to be used because God put them there for our use.

None of these things in themselves are bad. But, in these last days, and particularly in the days of these Corinthians who were experiencing a present distress, we must reevaluate the way in which we live in this life, knowing that it will not last forever and we should use life wisely for the glory of God.

We see this in verses 30 and 31, "...those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them."

He's not saying that you can't have any of these things. He's saying, don't let them take precedence over your relationship with Christ which is not temporal, but eternal.

And it's interesting that he would include in that list our marriages. Again, he's not downplaying marriage. But he puts even this in an eternal perspective. Remember, that marriage was only designed by God for this world.

MAT 22:30 "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

There will not be a need for marriage in the present heaven or on the new earth. And if that's the case then we need to put our

marriages into this eternal perspective and not let them take the place of God and His will in our lives, or take our marriages for granted.

Now, obviously God's will is that if we get married that is a good thing. But that's not the end of His will for His people.

His also includes service for Him outside of that marriage. To suggest that our marriages are an end-all when it comes to ministry is to miss the point of why we were saved.

Now granted, marriage is definitely a ministry given by God. It's a place where ministering is going on to one another and to our children. But Paul's point is that this institution is only temporary and therefore we must consider how an eternal perspective will give others, outside of that marriage, a taste of the love of Christ as we go forth to them with the gospel.

Yes, life will be hard and will want to distract us from being servants in other areas of life outside of our marriages. But, simply because life is hard does not mean we can neglect our marriages, nor ministry outside of marriage.

John MacArthur puts it this way. "Paul is teaching that marriage should not reduce the Christian's obligation and devotion to the Lord and His work. The responsibilities of marriage are no excuse for slacking the Lord's work. That is to invert the priorities....

.... Today is has become increasingly difficult, because of close attachment to family, to get Christians -- including missionaries -- to be strongly dedicated to serving the Lord.... There must be a balance, a scriptural balance, between fulfilling marriage needs and serving the Lord."

Now, neither John MacArthur, nor scripture would suggest that being faithful in marriage is not serving the Lord. What it means is that life doesn't revolve around our marriages from an eternal perspective. We still have an obligation to be ambassadors to the world both inside and outside of our marriages and that does take a balance. But it must be made. Neither should be neglected.

What Paul wants to drive home here is that when it comes to the local body in Corinth, and by extension every local body in the world at any time in history, there should be a devotion to extending the kingdom of God, individually and collectively as a church.

It all goes back to the parts of the body which Paul will be addressing later in this letter.

1CO 12:12,20-22 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,..."

Every part is important. And when one part is not functioning for whatever reason it affects the ability of the body to work properly. An eternal perspective looks at this through God's eyes and determines how I play a part in this body.

How can I be involved in the activity of the local body to be able to see God work through it to those both within and outside of that body? If Christ has placed me in the local body, to what extent do I take advantage of the grace He extends through its ministry to be better equipped to serve the Lord?

This is one of the reasons the writer of Hebrews goes out of his way to exhort the church to take the time to get together on a regular basis with the express purpose of encouraging each other in that local body so that each part is ready to serve the Lord.

HEB 10:24 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

The writer of Hebrews connects meeting together with being able to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. That can't be done effectively long distance or being separated from one another.

Again, we must not think that our marriages are something unimportant in the eternal scheme of things in the body of Christ. Paul would not have placed marriage as an institution to be viewed as representing the body of Christ in one sense had he thought it was unimportant.

EPH 5:22=25, 28 "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."

But this teaching is in the context of being a soldier for Christ. The sixth chapter of Ephesians spends a great deal of time encouraging the saints to put on the full armor of God, not to battle our wives or husbands or children, but to do battle for the Lord as those who go out and serve Him faithfully. That wouldn't exclude our marriages as something we should battle for, but it wouldn't be limited to them.

Again, that balance is so important and taking advantage of all that God has provided within the body of Christ which helps us to be equipped to serve Him faithfully. Remember, we are battling for the souls of people. And if we only look at one aspect of life and ministry then we become lopsided.

This is an exhortation to all of us who are single or married. And I would also add that those who are married and who take ministry, outside of that marriage, seriously, must be careful not to make that other ministry so important that the ministry in that marriage is neglected.

This is a real danger especially for those like Pastors or missionaries. I know how this works because we think the ministry is so important, and it is, but so is the ministry at home.

But this works both ways. Those who take their ministries at home seriously must not neglect that ministry which is taking place in the local body where Christ has placed you. Every part is essential. And without the support of each part and member the whole body suffers.

We must place life and ministry in this eternal perspective as does the apostle John.

1JO 2:17 "The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

Time is short and there's much work to be done for the gospel of Jesus Christ. People are dying every day, right here in Port Charlotte.

1PE 1:24-25 "For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord stands forever."

We've been called to be part of God's forever family. But we've also been called to share this forever with the rest of the world both individually and through the local body in which Christ has placed us.

This forever is a life of forgiveness which enables us to be reconciled to God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His glorious resurrection from the dead. As he lives even so we will live with Him as we repent and place our faith in His work on our behalf.

But only as we consider this new life that we have in Christ, in light of our present lives, will we ever become effective servants for Christ. He must be continually our all in all as we love and seek and serve Him.

COL 3:1-4 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

This is our hope. The time is short and this world is passing away. Paul could not have summed it up any better. Now what will we do with his exhortation? The fields are white unto harvest. We need to continue to be those planters of the word and to also be those harvesters as we go out to where the fields are.

Our field is right in our own community. And as a church we have the opportunity to pray for our community together. We have the opportunity to learn about God's word and will as we come together. And we have the opportunity to reach out as a church to this community.

Don't neglect your families or your jobs or your responsibilities to other people. But, please don't neglect your responsibility to Christ in this local assembly to go forth as His church to love and serve others outside of our immediate sphere of influence.

By God's grace and His strength He'll enable us to accomplish all things to His glory.