

1 Corinthians 7:32-40 Serve The Lord. This Is God's Will For You

This morning we're going to finish this section on Paul's exhortation concerning marriage and singleness and the ability to serve the Lord whether single or married. By way of quick recap, Paul has taken the time to explain how, under their "present distress" or crisis, as he points out in verse 26, these Corinthian believers need to reevaluate how they make long term plans.

Paul felt that under their present situation there in the area of Corinth they might be better off if those who were considering marriage put those plans on the back burner so that they could more effectively serve the Lord.

Paul was not suggesting that it was morally better to not get married, he was just trying to help them see that the most important aspect of life was to serve the one who gave His life for you and rose from the dead to ensure eternal fellowship with our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so, the point is that whether we are married or not, we still have an obligation to serve Christ outside of our present situation. We must still pursue the extension of the Kingdom of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, which necessitates that we must work through the local body in which Christ has placed us, to that end, as we go out into the world to give people the gospel.

This is why Paul used the analogy he did in verses 29 through 31.

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."

As we saw last week Paul was not teaching that if we have wives we should live in that house as though we didn't. He was not teaching that those who mourn should stop it, or that those who are happy should act as though they were mourning.

He was using poetic language to show how fleeting and temporary this world is and how we should begin viewing life from an eternal perspective as we go forth into this world to love and serve Christ.

And so, the sum of what Paul meant through verses 29 & 31 is, "the time is short, and this world in its present form is passing away."

So, what are we going to do about it? Are we going to be so absorbed with our own lives that we deny the rest of humanity the life giving truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He came into this world to do to buy us back?, is what Paul is asking.

Paul put it in a similar way when writing the Christians in Philippi.

PHI 2:3-7 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

He isn't saying to deny your family and responsibilities, but rather to understand the high calling to which you've been called in Christ and look outside of yourself to those around you who need to be ministered to with the gifts God has given you. And that should start in the local body to which Christ has called us and then extend outward.

As we continue with our text Paul is now going to give some practical reasons as to why he recommends that those who are not married or virgins put off getting married for the sake of serving Christ.

Again, keeping in mind that all of this is in the context of a present crisis happening there in the area of Corinth, which could have included, among other things, possible persecution and famine. Under normal circumstances Paul's exhortations would not apply with the same force.

1CO 7:32-34 "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs -how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world -how he can please his wife - 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world -how she can please her husband."

Now, here Paul starts by saying that in whatever state we find ourselves he wants us to be free from concern as to whatever path we choose, be that getting married or staying single. We can still serve the Lord as we lay our worries and cares on Him.

We don't have to be so side-tracked with life that we neglect the work of the Lord, is what Paul is conveying here. The NIV along with the NASB uses the phrase, "free from concern", in verse 32. The KJV uses a more convoluted phrase for 20th Century people, "I would have you without carefulness."

The NKJV takes that phrase and brings it closer to the original Greek intent using the phrase, "I want you to be without care."

It's so hard to serve the Lord when we're caught up with the concerns of life and the cares of this world. It does make it difficult, but what Paul is suggesting is that we don't have to compound the problem by adding extra cares to our situation. We can trust God even in the midst of a present crisis as did these Corinthians, and actually go forward with the work God has called us to.

Jesus points this out to the Jews of His day who most certainly had some things to be concerned with, and were certainly tempted to worry whether the yoke of Rome around their necks could still allow them to live life without fear and doubt.

MAT 6:31-34 "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Paul puts it this way.

PHI 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

The Lord is able to keep us on an even keel when the waves of life want to roll over us. Because you see, the Lord doesn't want us so concerned with how and when the boat will get to shore as much as He wants us to know that He's in the boat with us.

When we begin to understand this, then the cares of this life are lessened and we're more apt to get on with the task at hand of serving Christ both inside and outside of the church. The enemy is always doing his best to stir us up and keep us so concerned with life in this world that we miss the beauty of being involved with what God is doing.

So, in the case of these Corinthians, what is one way in which they can be free from concern? Well, one way is to understand their present situation and the choices they can make to best utilize the gifts and abilities Christ has given them, so that they can serve without worries and cares.

1CO 7:32-34 "..... An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs -how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world -how he can please his wife - 34 and his interests are divided."

What is Paul saying? When you get married you have responsibilities you didn't have when single. As a single person you have the ability to be more concerned about the Lord's affairs and how to please Him.

On the other hand, a married person is concerned about his spouse and pleasing them and so his interests are divided. Now, we must be careful not to read something into this which is not intended, like saying, being single is God's will for everyone.

Remember, Paul is dealing with a present crisis in the lives of these people and he's trying to help them best serve the Lord in that situation, as well as teaching general principles about life.

Anyone who is or was married knows that our interests are divided between family and God as it relates to service. In fact, this is the way it is to be. Paul isn't saying in the context that having a divided interest is bad, he's simply stating a fact about two "godly" interests.

And having stated a fact, he is showing these people and us that if we're going to make such choices in life we must take these things into consideration as Christians. But simply because we have godly divided interests does not mean that our love and devotion and service to the Lord should suffer.

For those who are married Paul is saying that to ensure that your service to Christ doesn't suffer consider how to juggle both interests. Don't neglect one for the other. Be good stewards and

managers of the life you've chosen so that both your family and Christ are served whole-heartedly.

Remember what Paul told Timothy, who was a young Pastor trying to disciple people who may very well have had divided interests and yet may not have been faithful in taking care of their families.

1TI 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.

The KJV puts it, "[he] is worse than an infidel."

I remember the story of a back-woods sort of preacher conveying how when he came to this passage he thought to himself, "I don't know what an infidel is, but I certainly don't want to be worse than one."

Paul would never suggest that we neglect our families so that we can serve Christ. But he would never suggest that we neglect our service to Christ to serve our families. We have responsibilities to accomplish both.

This is why he says that a single person does have an advantage here when it comes to serving Christ, just from a practical standpoint.

I can remember when I was a young single Christian what tremendous freedom there was to pick and choose how many bible studies I wanted to go to during the week, or what ministries I wanted to involve myself in. I didn't have to worry what time to be home if we wanted to go down to the strip on Ft. Lauderdale beach and pass out gospel tracts to people coming out of the bars and clubs.

When I got married some of that changed. Why? Because I had divided interests. I now had my wife to consider. And so, it took some planning and juggling of our time to serve the Lord in different ways as well as meeting our own needs.

Now, when Paul says in verse 34 that a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world, he is not necessarily suggesting that he is caught up in the world. The context here really does not allow for that interpretation. The only thing Paul means is that his concerns are taking care of life in this world with the added responsibility of meeting the needs of his wife and family.

We do that in the context of having to live in the world. It's called life.

But again, Paul is also saying that we can't use that excuse to drop out of the responsibilities we have toward Christ outside of our families. In contrast, Paul uses the single person's life to show how those undivided interests give more time for service to Christ.

1CO 7:34 "... An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world -how she can please her husband."

Both are good as it concerns the will of God for each. It's not an either/or proposition from a moral stand-point. But from a practical stand-point under adverse conditions it might be more advantageous to be single, is Paul's' point.

1CO 7:35 "I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."

Paul has no intention of binding the consciences of these people who may decide, despite the present crisis or distress, to get married anyway. This is exactly what he said earlier.

1CO 7:28 "But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned."

It's not a matter of sinning or not as it relates to marriage under adverse conditions, it's a matter of practicality so as not to neglect our service to Christ, which for Paul, is not an option. We don't have that option to decide to sit on the sidelines. We've been called by Christ to follow Him. And my guess is that He's not leading us to our own little throne to watch everyone else do the work.

Paul wants us to serve in the freedom we have in Christ; the freedom we have as we've been set free from the penalty of sin so that we might serve in the power of the Spirit.

He says in verse 35, "I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, ..."

The NASB says, "not to put a restraint upon you." The more literal rendering here is that of a noose. I don't want to put a noose on you. The idea here is that of hunting as you put a trap on the ground where an animal steps into the noose and is caught.

Paul doesn't want any of these people to be constrained to serve under compulsion. He wants them to serve because of a love for Christ and a devotion which is undivided.

And despite the fact that our interests may be divided, our devotion should never be divided. We can be devoted to family and Christ.

Paul now moves from the unmarried person and the virgin to another person and that is the one who has a virgin.

1CO 7:36-38 "If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. 37 But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin - this man also does the right thing. 38 So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better."

This has been a somewhat confusing portion because of the way "virgin" is addressed here. In some translations it adds the word daughter. So it may read, "If any man thinks he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter."

In the original Greek it's simply the word virgin and by implication, a marriageable maiden.

But some have thought that it's in reference to a father arranging the marriage of his virgin daughter since this was the practice in many ancient cultures.

And so, the inference is that if the father wants to keep his daughter a virgin by not allowing her to get married, so she can better serve the Lord, then he is well within his rights to do so.

But, the problem with such an approach is that it takes the choice out of the daughter's hands completely. If she burns with passion, as Paul has addressed earlier, then the father actually causes her to sin.

The other problem is the way verse 36 describes the man acting unbecomingly or improperly toward his virgin. How this would fit a father of a virgin is not quite clear. But it would make more sense if a man, who is betrothed to his virgin, was acting in a way that would be improper from a sexual stand-point; something which Paul has already addressed in this letter.

It seems the more natural explanation of this section has to do with a man engaged to a virgin. In fact, that's the way the NIV takes it as it adds the phrase, "the virgin he is engaged to..."

In light of this, what is Paul saying when he suggests that he thinks it's a good idea for virgins to stay single for practical considerations because of the present crisis?

Again, it's really rather simple. You have the freedom in Christ, especially since the Scriptures make it clear that marriage is designed by God to be a good thing. Here in verse 36 he says, if the man who has a virgin "feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married."

But he also allows the man to understand that he can also choose not to, so as to be a servant of Christ without divided interests.

1CO 7:37 "But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin - this man also does the right thing."

Again, from a practical consideration, choosing to stay single is not sinful in and of itself. But as verse 37 suggests this should be a decision which the couple should discuss. No one should be forcing him to choose one way or the other. The decision should be made under careful thoughtfulness.

But, after having weighed all of this out, if he decides not to marry, then he has also done the right thing. So, either way, if he chooses to marry or not he has made a decision which is not out of accord with God's will for that individual.

But then Paul adds the statement, "So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better." (1CO 7:38)

Better from what stand-point? Better only in that he has given himself, and by implication, herself, the opportunity to serve Christ without the divided interest. That's a good thing. No one has to feel that simply because we can get married that we have to, unless you feel that that's what the Lord wants for you.

As Paul has been saying, either way is good. What is better has only to do with the present crisis that is happening here in the area of Corinth. Simply because the man does not marry the woman

he's engaged to at the present time doesn't mean he couldn't do so later. But the word of God gives him the option.

As John MacArthur puts it, "the choice is not between right and wrong, but between good and better."

And so the question should always be framed in, how may I best serve the Lord? If the answer is with a wife and family, then praise God, serve the Lord in that capacity. If it's being single with an undivided interest, then praise God, serve Him in that capacity.

But the bottom line is, serve the Lord where He has placed you, both inside and outside of being single or married. And by that the Lord means to serve in the local body where He has placed us.

The last part of chapter seven wraps up the questions these people had written to Paul concerning marriage. Verse 39 builds upon verse 10 which says, "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband."

1CO 7:39 "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord."

If the husband dies the wife is free to marry again. This is the same teaching Paul gives to the Romans.

ROM 7:2 "For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage."

But in our text in 1Corinthians Paul adds that she must marry one who is a Christian. He would expound upon that teaching in the second letter he wrote to them.

2CO 6:14-15 "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?"

Again, this is very practical teaching to help the Christian find himself in the most ideal situation to serve Christ. Don't forget, that's what this whole section is all about. How can I serve Christ most effectively, either in my singleness or in my marriage as I serve the Lord in the body of Christ?

If Paul had his way, (and he did for his own life), he would suggest to these single people to stay single for the time being so that their devotion will be entirely upon serving Christ.

1CO 7:40 "In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is - and I think that I too have the Spirit of God."

I like the way Paul ends this section. "..... and I think that I too have the Spirit of God."

I'm sure there were those in Corinth who were acting on what they thought was the leading of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, there are Christians who will use this phrase to follow after their own desires, while saying that they've sought the Lord on it.

Paul wouldn't deny that they may have sought the Lord on it, but adds that the direction he has given is most certainly from the Holy Spirit since this is God's word, as Paul is inspired by the Spirit to deliver it.

He is still speaking, as the first verse of this letter indicates, as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...."

And so, as one commentator puts it, "his command was God's command, and his advice was God's advice." (John MacArthur)

HEB 4:12-13 "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

Our service to God is not an option. Our devotion to God is not an option. Our love for the Lord in lives of obedience is not an option. His word has made it clear that we do not belong to ourselves, we belong to Him because He has purchased us with the blood of His Son.

There are many things in life where we have liberty in Christ, but choosing to sit on the sidelines is not one of them. But we need God's grace and strength to love and serve Him effectively.

May we always seek the Lord and ask how we may serve Him in our homes and in our local body. After all we were saved to serve the Lord.

REV 1:4-6 John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:
Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is
to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from
Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the
dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us
and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to
be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be
glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

The writer of Hebrews would concur that our greatest privilege is
to be servants of our Most High God precisely because of Jesus
Christ and His redemption for us.

HEB 9:14 "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who
through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God,
cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we
may serve the living God!"

I'll let Peter close out this thought.

1PE 4:10 "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to
serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various
forms."