

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

“Giving God Undivided Devotion”

That’s really the over-arching emphasis that’s found in this remaining portion of 1st Cor Ch 7, now the *information* that Paul *deals with* is that of marriage and singleness. But the *application* that Paul *delivers* is that time is short; therefore what is of primary importance is that we do what we can do to be in a position that lends itself *practically* to an undivided devotion and dedication to God *personally*.

But that’s not something whereby a blanket statement can be made that applies equally to all people. So that as to where in the 1st ½ of this Ch as Paul is speaking on marriage and divorce he can speak very specifically and dogmatically. “This is how it is, if you’re married you’re to stay married, if there’s marital unfaithfulness then you are released if you choose not to reconcile and you can remarry. However apart from that there may be a reason that you need to *depart*, but you’re not to *divorce*.” That’s the biblical stand with respect to the relationship of 2 believers regarding marriage and divorce. **Now, if you were married as 2 non-believers and you came to Christ but your spouse didn’t and he/she chooses to remain with you, you’re to stay. However if they initiate, or instigate a departure from you, or decided to divorce you, then let them go, you’re not under bondage in such cases, you’re free to re-marry, Vs 15 “God has called us to peace.”** Now last week someone approached me regarding the circumstance whereby they were married and divorced as 2 non-believers, but now this particular individual *is* a believer. What applies in that situation? Well, the bible says, “...*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*” 2 Cor 5:17 **Once you give your heart to Christ, your slate is wiped clean, you’re a new creature, a new creation, as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. You’re forgiven, you’ve repented, move on in the freedom with which Christ has made you free.** If God brings someone into your life, rejoice in that. So with in the confines of the Christian marriage we have biblical absolutes. However when it comes to whether or not as a believer is it best for me to get married or remain single, that’s a matter of prayer and preference.

You see with respect to serving God with undivided devotion, it may be that in order for me to do that most effectively I need to be married. If not, my overwhelming desire for companionship may be constantly frustrating me, aggravating me, distracting me. **But if I don’t really feel the need to be married, God has given me the ability to remain single so that I’m not always burning out of control with passion, then it would be a distraction for me to bog myself down with the responsibilities of marriage.**

So in this section Paul is inspired to simply lay out some principles to consider when it comes to what would be best for me, or the most conducive in my personal situation that I might serve God whole-heartedly, unswervingly, with undivided devotion.

Now last week we sorta hurried through Vs 17-24 for the sake of time, but you remember the primary point that was being made there... “Stay the course,” live as you’re called. and He’ll underscore that again in Vs 27, but the idea is that we’re let God make the most of our lives in whatever station in life that we may be.

There are those who have a chronic “Grass is greener” disease thinking that they’ll really be able to buckle down and serve the Lord as soon as their current situation changes, but until that time they’re sort of restricted. The single person says, “When I get married I’ll be full tilt for Jesus Christ”

The married person says, “Man, if I were single I could really serve the Lord.” The person married to an unbelieving spouse says, “If they were just out of the picture I could really serve the Lord.” and Paul is saying, “Enough with that nonsense, that’s the situation you were in when God called you, so serve God *in* that situation with all that you are!” Look at Vs 20, (read)

You don’t have to wait on your station in life to change before you can serve the Lord with your whole heart, wherever you’re at, serve God there. Be a light at school, show them Jesus at work, be the salt of the earth in whatever capacity God has called you in. Now there has to be a bit of context understood here, if you’re in vocation that’s illegal, or somehow sinful, then you need to get out of that. But outside of that, remain in the same calling in which you were called.

Vs21-22

In Paul’s day as you know the Roman Empire consisted of millions of slaves. and Slaves were used for all kinds of things, some of them were teachers and educators, others were household stewards, some were farm workers, and they could be on any # of rungs of the social strata. **But Paul is continuing to emphasize that your “lot in life” is peripheral, loving God, serving God, being obedient to the Word of God is what is primary. He’s saying, “Don’t be sitting there thinking (if you’re a slave) ‘boy if I were only free, then I could really serve Jesus, I’d be a different man, but because I’m a slave I just can’t give my *all* to Christ.”** He says, “If you’re called as a slave you’re free in Christ, if you’re called free, you become Christ’s slave, your lot in life is irrelevant, what’s relevant is that you’re committed to Christ from the heart and have availed yourself to be used *by* Him to the utmost of your ability.” Now if you can be made free, go for it, but don’t think that God can’t use your life if your situation doesn’t change. **So perhaps you’re in some meager vocation that’s got a very limited sphere of influence. Paul isn’t saying that’s the slot God’s carved out for you to be in forever, if you have the opportunity to advance yourself, or improve your situation, go for it, but don’t think that God can’t use you right where you’re at. That’s the main application here, be content where you’re at, and let God use you in your current station in life, notice Vs 24. (Read)**

Ok, we remember that Paul is addressing some questions that the Corinthians had written to him about, we have the answers, we don’t have the questions. (Jeopardy) The 1st question seemed to deal primarily with a marriage relationship, and what’s proper between a husband and wife regarding sexual relations, is it something inherently dirty or sinful, would it be best to abstain? **To which Paul answered, “If you’re single you need to abstain from relations with a woman, if you’re married it’s a healthy and encouraged aspect of the relationship to be with your wife.” Don’t think that it’s somehow more holy, or super spiritual to abstain from one another in a marriage union.**

Those are the kind of opportunities that Satan loves to take advantage of. So Paul spent some time discussing the proper perspective on a marriage relationship, be it believer to believer, and even believer to unbeliever. and He says, “Live as you’re called.” Now the question seems to come up regarding being single, “If I’m not married, should I even get married?”

Vs25

Now we need to again clarify the fact that when he says, “I have no commandment from the Lord.” That’s he’s not saying that this is simply uninspired opinion. We’ve got to keep the context of the totality of the Word of God which says, “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” 2 Tim 3:16-17 There is not one aspect of the scriptures that’s not God breathed, all Paul is saying is that what he’s sharing you won’t find written previously, or that Jesus didn’t teach on it specifically.

But he’s every bit as much inspired to write this as was any other human instrument that God gave us His Word through. and He recognizes as I mentioned in our time of introduction that when it comes to what’s conducive for me to serve the Lord with undivided devotion, may be different than what’s needed for *you* to serve the Lord with out distraction. and So though there’s not a dogmatic position that God issues on the subject, He does give us some principles to think through as we approach the idea of, “Should I get married, or should I remain single.” and Really what Paul is saying is, “That’s up to you, and it’s not sin either way, these are simply some things that the Holy Spirit would have you to consider as you’re weighing out that decision.” and He says,

Vs26-28

So should I get married, or should I not be married? 1st off Paul says, “Listen, I think that wherever you’re at currently, is what’s best for you presently. If you’re married, don’t look for loopholes to get out of it, if you’re single don’t go probing around and pursuing a spouse, just be content where you’re at.”

and Paul qualifies his reason specifically, but it’s a principle that applies generally to us all. As far as his specific reason he says, “Because of the present distress.” Now what is the present distress? Well, there are a # of opinions on that, some say, “Well, with the growing persecution against the church Paul was encouraging them to be sober minded about their present circumstance.” Others say, “Perhaps Paul was speaking with a prophetic insight as the radical onslaught against Christians that was preparing to break loose via Caesar Nero.” Still others say, “Paul, knowing that Jesus spoke of the distress that would fall upon them just prior to His return and believing that they were living in the time that Christ would return was encouraging them to simply remain as they were and not move hastily in one direction or the other.” and To be honest with you since the bible doesn’t say exactly what the “present distress” was, I don’t know. Perhaps it was a bit of all the above, or perhaps it was none of the above, but the bottom line is that because of it Paul could see the benefit of simply remaining where you were at.

Hey lets be honest, it's much easier if you're single to be mobile and able to navigate through a crisis situation than if you have an entire family to consider and be responsible for. If persecution is coming, if I'm single, I don't need to return home, I don't need to worry about accommodations, I'll sleep in a field or in a forest somewhere, anywhere it doesn't really matter. **But if I have a wife, a baby, a 3, 6, and 16 yr old, that complicates matters. If I'm being persecuted, perhaps I'll be able to take it, but what if it's my children, or my wife, will I be able to maintain the same resolve? and This may seem like a far off concept for us in modern day U.S.A. but for the 1st century church and in many parts of the world still today, this is reality. What then is the advantage to remaining married in that situation?** Because if your family ever needed you it's certainly in times of tribulation, persecution, and distress, you don't abandon your family in their hour of greatest need. So the idea here in Vs 27 is that we're not to look for loopholes or be so quick to want to change our station in life. If you're not married, don't freak out about it, or feel like you have to chase down a husband or a wife, just serve God where you're at. *But*, (Vs 28) if you do marry, that's ok, it's not sin.

Paul isn't laying down dogmatic law, forbidding marrying, he's simply inspired to encourage you to consider your present situation and use wisdom in the decisions that you're making. **I mean think of Paul's life, everywhere he went there was either a revival or a riot, often times he'd be beaten, thrown in prison, he was stoned and left for dead, he'd been shipwrecked, bobbed around in the open sea for a day and a night, now imagine bringing the wife and kids along for the experience. It just wouldn't pan out for Paul and he realized that, for him, being single was the greater choice.**

But should you choose marriage, that's just fine, you're not more or less spiritual either way. Now you need to know that marriage isn't always a primrose path of pleasantries, there are some advantages, but there are disadvantages as well. Paul says, "If you get married you're going to have trouble in the flesh (that is practically), but I would spare you." **So though it's not sin to marry, it can invite certain struggles into your life. Some of which we've touched on, but any time you get 2 sinners together it's just a matter of time before a problem of some type arises. and You have to be prepared to deal with that, count that cost in advance. So though marriage is an honorable thing, and has its advantages, be aware that it's not a constant state of euphoria, there are some struggles that can arise in the relationship.**

Vs29-31

So you see being married, or being single is really not the primary point with Paul, the heart of what he's getting to is found in Vs 29, (underline it) "the time is short," so we need to be safeguarding our heart that we might serve the Lord with undivided devotion. Because there are pitfalls and things to beware of along the way that can easily serve to distract us, and Paul sights 3 of those things right here.

But 1st we want to take a moment to consider this phrase, "The time is short." What does that mean, is Paul speaking prophetically, or personally? Hey, the statement is true in either context. Prophetically, the book of Hebrews tells us, "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.*" Heb 1:1-2 What does that mean? That means that God has qualified the 1st coming of Christ as, "The beginning of the end."

The human race has been living in the last days (from the eternal perspective) from the 1st coming of Christ and those days will culminate at the 2nd coming of Christ. Everything between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ the bible constitutes as, "These last days." The time is short, in the book of Romans Paul put it like this, *"And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."* Rom 13:11 **Every moment of everyday that goes by brings us that much closer to seeing Jesus Christ face to face. The time is short. Jesus Himself said in Rev 22, "Behold, I am coming quickly!" Rev 22:7 People think, "Oh it's been 2,000 yrs," forgetting that with the Lord a day is as 1,000 yrs and 1,000 yrs is as a day. So God has delayed His coming 2 days, why? Because He's not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.** Peter said, *"... the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,"* 2 Peter 3:10-11 and Paul sensing the prophetic urgency says, "The time is short."

But not only is the time short prophetically, it's also short personally. Say you live to be 120...what is that in the scope of eternity, and what will you have done with your life that will count for eternity? There's not much time for you and me personally, we need to be busy about **eternal matters practically.** The bible tells us, *"Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; He flees like a shadow and does not continue."* Job 14:1-2 David in crying out to the Lord said, *"Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor."* Ps 39:5

Time is short, safeguard your heart from divided devotion. What are these distractions that Paul warns us of. The 1st area of distraction that he cautions us regarding is this area of family. He says, "Listen, from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none." **Now I know that there are some of you guys that want to take this as your memory Vs for the week, but context is key. He's not saying, "Go enjoy life with the guys, do your own thing, live as though you had no wife." He's not justifying self centered behavior.**

Remember Vs 3? "Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her." Again read Eph 5, Col 3. But what he is saying is that we're not to avoid being engaged in kingdom business because of our family. Oh I'm not saying that there doesn't have to 1st be harmony between you and your wife or your husband. But he's saying be careful lest you prioritize family matters over kingdom matters. **Let me explain, there are people whom God desires to use in ministry, or in missions but they say, "I can't right now, I'm fixing to get married, but once we're settled in we'll really serve the Lord." A year later they'd really love to but there's a child on the way, and next thing you know we're committed to various school activities, boy scouts and sports, then it's once the kids are out of the home, and over and over again I've seen it.** and Often times those who's focus is so family oriented will often times have family problems and it's not because it's bad to be involved in your family, it's right and proper. But not to the neglect of what God is wanting to do in and through your life. Jesus is to be the center, not family.

Oh family is 1st after Jesus, it seems to defeat the purpose to win the lost but lose your family. But Jesus has to be 1st, seek 1st the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and God will take care of your life.

The 2nd obstacle? Vs 30, Being overwhelmed emotionally, so we can over prioritize family, and we can easily be distracted emotionally, and again Paul isn't turning a blind eye to who we are as emotional beings. But the point is that we don't have time to be, overwhelmed, divided, or distracted in our service to the Lord based upon how *I* feel. The bottom line is that people are leaving the planet everyday with out Jesus, and I might be *e*lated emotionally, or *d*eflated emotionally, doesn't matter, the focus isn't to be on me, it's to be on others. Time is too short to be self absorbed.

3^{rdly} finally, the last phrase of Vs 30 on into Vs 31 (read). Don't get distracted materially, we're in the world, but not of the world. and It's not wrong to use the things that God has so graciously given us in the world. But keep a very light grip on them, because if you're not careful this transition can be made whereby I no longer possess my things, but my things possess me. There's a difference between using this world, and misusing, or abusing it. Jesus spoke over and over about the snares of getting preoccupied with the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things. Paul told Timothy, "*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*" 1 Tim 6:9-10 So don't get preoccupied with the material things of this world, it'll be a snare to you. and Amongst other things that's one reason that tithing is so healthy for us spiritually. Not because God needs our money, but because every time we give of ourselves that way, we're crucifying part of our stinginess, our shortsightedness, we're dying to self-centeredness. Hey, if God blesses you materially that's great, but don't get distracted by it, don't prioritize a pursuit of it to the neglect of your relationship with the Lord and His plan and purpose for your life, the time is too short.

It's not that God wants you to be miserable so He says these things, it's quite the opposite. He wants you to be free, and He teaches us that the pathway to freedom is to forget about ourselves, crucify the flesh and seek 1st the kingdom of God, and He'll add to your life everything you need. So focus on your relationship with Him personally, be about the work of eternity, serve Him whole heartedly, and you'll be blessed abundantly.

Vs32-34

Paul is just stating some simple facts here, if you're single as a believer your focus is on the Lord, how you can *serve* Him, your desire is to be *pleasing* to Him, you're completely *available* to Him.

If you're married there are some other factors, you have a wife, or a husband, perhaps a family. and It's important to you to please them, to be there for them, and a blessing *to* them. and Paul isn't saying that's wrong, it's right and proper, there's something wrong if you don't care about pleasing your spouse.

But the fact is that I'm not as free to serve the Lord with out restraint, or restriction as I would be if I weren't married. You guys know I'm not a huge fan of flying. But in all honesty I wouldn't be near as concerned about it if I didn't have a wife and children. Oh I wouldn't like it, but if something happened, it'd be a drag on the way down, but I'm going to be with the Lord. But it burdens me to think of not being there for my wife and family. and I think that's only proper, and that's what Paul is saying here. If you're unmarried you don't have certain burdens and restrictions that you have if you *are* married.

But I want you to notice something here real quick. As Paul was mentioning the perspective of the individual be they married or unmarried, did you notice who they weren't concerned for? In either case, unmarried is thinking about the Lord, married is thinking about their spouse, but in either case who they weren't thinking of was self. Self isn't in the equation of the Christian life. Jesus said, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" Matt 16:24-25 Paul said it like this, "...those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Gal 5:24-25 We're to do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind esteem other's as better than ourselves, looking out not for our own interests but for the interests of others, let *this* mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

Vs35

You see there it is, it's not a legalistic bondage thing, either way you go, marriage or singleness one is no more spiritual than the other and if God has gifted you with the ability to remain single than you do well to marry when God brings someone into your life. But Paul's point is that you consider who, when, and why that you might serve the Lord with out distraction, that is, undivided devotion.

Vs36-38

You have to remember that in this day marriages were pre-arranged. and Paul seems to be sort of re-iterating this same principle from the perspective of the parental responsibility. Maybe the dad said, "My daughter isn't ever gonna get married." But in time the dad realizes he's made a mistake, his daughter desires to marry, he realizes celibacy isn't something God has called her to, so he says, "It's ok let her get married."

Vs39

So another underscoring of the gravity of the marriage vows before God, count the cost because it's to be, "Till death due us part." But should your spouse go to be with the Lord, than the law is absolved, and you're released to remarry, but only in the Lord. That is you're to marry another believer as God brings that person into your life. Remember we're to be content with where we're at until such time as God brings us into that next phase of life that He has for us. and God has put these "walls" around marriage, not to make it a prison, but a fortress of safety and security. If marriage seems like it would be a prison to you, than do yourself a favor and don't get married.

Vs40

Paul here affirming that he's not just making stuff up, but that these principles have been given, and guided by the Spirit of God. What's the point? That whatever station of life we may be in, we need to be giving God undivided devotion, and whole hearted dedication.

Prayer Points:

Father, that's certainly the desire of our heart, to serve You, and be dedicated/consecrated to You with our *whole* heart. Teach us what it means to be undivided in our devotion to You. That we would prioritize and place proper perspective on things such as family, or being bogged down emotionally, or pursuing the material things of this world. **God I pray for the single people here today, that You might give them godly contentment with where they're at until such time as You would perhaps lead them into a marriage union. and For those who are married God that You'd be the center of that union, and that wherever we may find ourselves that we'd give You all that we are in this moment, not waiting for our situation to change. Just use us for Your glory, in whatever way You see fit.**

and I just want you to know that God sees fit to receive you unto Himself and make you His own. Perhaps you don't know the Lord, you've never given your heart *to* the Lord. God wants to make you brand new, you're all too familiar with the feeling of guilt, you know what it means to feel dirty and unclean, God wants to wash you white like snow. **As we mentioned towards the beginning of our time together if anyone be in Christ they are a new creation, old things pass away behold all things are made new. There's only one condition to old things passing away, and all things being made new, and that's being *in Christ*.** Forgiveness is but the request of your heart away. Jesus shed His blood for you, died on the cross for you, and rose again the 3rd day to justify you. If He's knocking on the door of your heart, let me encourage you, don't resist Him, receive Him.