

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Rethink Marriage Pt 4

Rethink Singleness

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 11.20-21.10

Well, let's take our bibles and turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 7. We're in an exegetical study which means we're studying verse by verse through the book of 1 Corinthians and so what we're doing is we're taking topics as they come, as we move through the book. We're approaching the topics that we see in the text naturally. A few weeks ago we started in chapter 7 and it's Paul's discourse to the Corinthians essentially on relationships. He focuses on marriage in the first half of the chapter and then he begins talking to those who are unmarried and those who are widowed. We went through an issue on divorce and remarriage. Now as we come to verse 25 he is talking to those who are single. There is an underlying assumption in our culture that everyone who is not married is looking for someone. The assumption is that if you're single then you just haven't found the right person, you haven't found your mate yet. And those of us who are married, we're often overly anxious to help those who are single to find someone and so we set them up on dates. Or we follow the cultural pattern. Have you noticed this explosion of dating services? Especially online dating referral services? There's things like match.com, eharmony. I saw one this week called plentyoffish.com. That was interesting. Our culture just has this aspect, this assumption that if you're single then you should be looking. You need to know that the scriptures take a completely different tact when it comes to singleness.

Actually, Paul says in verse 7 of chapter 7, he says I wish that all were as I myself but each has his own gift from God. That word gift is the word *chárisma* which means to show favor. If you are married you have been given a gift in your marriage. But scripture also says, on the opposite side that if you're single God has given you a gift. He has shown you favor through your singleness.

What we're going to learn this morning is actually a complete reversal of what we have understood or have grown up to understand in our culture. We're going to see that Paul actually takes the issue of singleness and he argues not against it but for it and he gives the people at Corinthians, those who are single three reasons to remain that way. That's the sense of the text this morning. Let's look at verse 25 to get started.

He says, now concerning the betrothed, which is the Greek word *parthénos*. Literally it means virgin or chaste. But in the general sense, which is how it's being used here it means unmarried. So, he's writing to the unmarried. He says I have no command from the Lord. Which is a way of saying that Jesus didn't teach on this topic directly, therefore Paul is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to add to revelation. He says, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. Verse 26, I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free? Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry you have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles and I would spare you that.

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First reason that Paul gives to the singles of Corinth not to be married is the troubles of the world. He says this twice. He says, first there is a present distress and then towards the end of verse 28 he actually calls that worldly troubles. What does that mean? What have we learned in the past? That if you want to understand the scriptures you have to understand it in context and you have to understand history. Remember, we're reading a document that's roughly two-thousand years old. We're looking into a culture two-thousand years old. You have to understand it's culture or you can't understand what the biblical writer is talking about.

Let me give you an example. Imagine if you take just something that happened, say within the last five or ten years that we all understood and you projected that two-thousand years into the future? How would those people understand the culture or those events that we understood unless they studied it. For example, we all remember a few years ago during the election controversy, Fox news carried the story in Florida about the hanging chads on the ballot ticket. Now, if I just made a reference about Fox covering the elections in Florida and the hanging chads you would all understand what I mean. But if you project that two-thousand years forward people won't have any clue. First they won't understand well, what is fox. What does he mean by this? We understand that as a news agency. Someone might say is he an animal? Is that what he's talking about? Or we understand that we have a state in our country called Florida. In two-thousand years in the future they might not understand – what is Florida? And who's Chad and why does he have things hanging on him? You see, we have understandings of that because it's a cultural thing. But those in the future would have to study. We have to study in reverse. We have to study history, especially biblical history to understand what is going on.

What was going on at this particular time was a wave of persecution that was moving across Asia Minor. We saw throughout scripture believers who were imprisoned, wrongfully so; beaten. Some of them martyred or murdered for the faith. Paul, who was the poster child of people being persecuted, seemed like every stop he made around the Mediterranean, around Asia Minor he was being persecuted. He's saying to the Corinthians, listen those of you who are single. Because of the present persecution, because of the present distress you ought to think seriously before getting involved in a relationship.

Jesus forewarned about persecution. He said in John 16 the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God. They saw that as reality. Jesus also said they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you. Paul writes to Timothy – all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Peter, the Apostle said do not be surprised at the fiery trial as if some strange things were happening. There's all throughout scripture warning of persecution. This is another one but it's in a specific cultural sense.

In fact, the idea of persecution, the fact of persecution was about to strike home to the Corinthian church. There was a man named Erastus. We read of him in Romans 16:23. He

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was the city treasurer of Corinth. He became a follower of Christ through the ministry of Paul while he was ministering in Corinth. Erastus then hooked up with Timothy and they started to travel to Macedonia and it was in Macedonia that Erastus actually gave his life for the faith of Jesus Christ. He was a martyr. Years later when the Corinthians would read this text they were probably thinking that Paul was being prophetic because they would have known, first hand example, a man who had been part of their church would die because of the present distress.

You see, Paul was saying with this rise of persecution it may be better endured if you're single. Now, when you come across a text like this, especially when it's embedded in this cultural content you have to ask the question does this advice match the temperament of our society today? Is this advice for me today? Well, you really have to ask yourself another question to what degree do I feel called to serve the Lord? You see, singleness is not just pre-marriage, right? Singleness can happen in the midst of the middle of your life because of divorce or a death or a change of circumstances. It can happen in later parts of your life when you loose a spouse and you decide at this time not to remarry. Paul is saying use this station in life to consider how you might serve the Lord. Throw yourself into serving Christ because he's gifted you with this station in life.

One of the common things that I'll often give a person who comes seeking advice about their relationship about serving the Lord. Well, what do you want to do with the rest of your life? Imagine, dream – if you could do anything in service to Christ, now with this change in your life or with this station in life what would you do? I remember when I was in seminary most of the mission organizations required that you would be married before deploying you to a mission field. They felt like it added stability. That's all changed today. Do you realize that? There are hundreds of thousands of believers who are single who are now being deployed in sometimes very dangerous areas of the world. When I was traveling through Israel I met a man who ran a mission organization and he deployed people into very dangerous areas of the Gaza Strip, the Hezbollah, into Jordan, into areas that they may loose their lives. And he said I prefer sending missionaries who are single. Sometimes it is people who it's second career singles. In this world there might not be troubles like the time of Corinth but there are troubles and if you throw yourself into service of the Lord you may be throwing yourself into harms way. What Paul was originally saying to the singles you have to see the environment and the landscape before you move forward in your marital plans.

Now, he said if a single decides to get married or re-married, notice in verse 28 he says you have not sinned. It's not a sin if you are single and you decide to marry. He says either way it's a gift of God. It's a gift of God if you're married. It's a gift of God if you're single. But, he says this. You will have worldly trouble. What does he mean by that? Well, he clarifies what he means in verses 29 through 31. And I want us to look at this section of scripture

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carefully. Not only does Paul give us the second reason why if you are single you ought to remain that way but imbedded in this passage we get his life philosophy.

Now let me help you dissect the passage. Paul's mind would occasionally wander. He would start on one subject and then he would rabbit trail on another subject. Sometimes they were connected. Sometimes they were not so connected. This is an example of Paul rabbit trailing. They semi-connect. Let me show you how.

He says this in verse 29, this is what I mean, brothers. He says this what I mean about worldly troubles. The appointed time has grown very short. Now he's going to re-connect this thought that he just finished at the end of verse 31. In the meantime, there is a section where he kind of takes a little trip and if you want to mark this in your scriptures you can mark this as a parenthesis starting with the word from in verse 29. From now on let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had not goods, those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. You might want to end the quotation after the word it. We're going to come back. We're going to look at this paragraph. We're going to look at this parenthesis very carefully. But then Paul re-starts his original thought – for the present form of this world is passing away. So you might connect verse 29 & 31 as one thought. He says, this is what I mean brothers, the appointed time has grown very short for the present form of this world is passing away.

What's he's saying, point two, the reason why if you're single you ought to remain that way is because this world is passing away. It's changing and what he's referring to is the return of the Lord. He's referring to the next event on God's time table and that is that this world will go away and there will be a new heaven and a new earth created but everything will be different and he says this. He says that the form of this world or the mode of this world, look at the word the present form, verse 31. That's the word schema and what he's saying is the mode of life that you and I are used to is going to change especially when it comes to relationships. Relationships will be different in the new heaven and the new earth.

Do you realize that Jesus taught about this? Jesus taught about this when he had a run in with a group called the Sadducees.