LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 7 :25-40

Marriage, Singleness and the Kingdom of God

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hi everybody, welcome back to our continuing study through 1 Corinthians. We're going to finish up chapter 7 this time. We're going to be picking up the study in verse 25 through the end of the chapter. And some of you might have read ahead on some of these verses and you might be wondering why we didn't just tag these on to our last study because the Apostle Paul is still talking about marriage. And we dealt with that subject in a fairly lengthy study last time.

But the reason I wanted to take these verses alone is because there's some really challenging things to talk about. Not necessarily challenging from an understanding standpoint. Challenging really from a translation standpoint. There are some significant differences in the way some of these verses are rendered depending on the Bible that you are reading at the time. So you just need to know about that.

And I want to kind of talk a little bit in this study about how to handle those challenges and what they mean for you as a student of God's Word. So let's pray and we'll get into the Word today. Father, we do thank you for the opportunity today to be together and to study the Scriptures. We ask, Lord, that you would guide and direct our understanding and that you would increase our heart to learn, to know, to receive, and to apply the Word of God into our lives. We thank you and praise you for this time in Jesus' precious and holy name.

Amen. Amen. All right, starting in verse 25. And we're going to get right into it here with some, well, some challenging insights. Paul begins by saying, now concerning the betrothed.

Now I'm reading from the English Standard Version, that's the ESV. Some of you might be reading along with the New King James. Some of you might even have a New American Standard Bible. Some of you might have an NIV or perhaps even a King James Version. Your Bible is going to say different things here and I want to explain why.

Now concerning the betrothed. This is a word, and I'm grabbing my tablet here with my notes because I need to get this straight for you. This is the Greek word parthenos, and it is typically translated virgin. Some of your Bibles say that. It can also be translated maiden.

And that would obviously lead you to believe that the Apostle Paul is talking about unmarried women. But as we're going to get into this section of Scripture, I believe that what we're going to find is that the Apostle Paul is not just making reference to women who are unmarried, but potentially also men. He's dealing with marriage in a very general sense, but he's talking specifically about people who have yet to marry and whether they should or not. And we want to make the point, as we did in the last study, that the Apostle Paul's remarks concerning marriage are made from the standpoint of ministry and also what was happening in Corinth at the time this letter was written. So let's take a look at this again.

And by the way, instead of betrothed, which we don't use that word today, we might better render this Greek word for this context, the unmarried, now concerning the unmarried. And apparently these were some further questions that the Corinthians had for the Apostle Paul. He begins by saying, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. We need to stop there again. I know we haven't gotten very far, but whenever the Apostle Paul, or frankly any biblical writer, is to say something like this, this isn't from the Lord specifically as far as from a command.

I'm sharing this with you, and Paul makes it very clear here, I'm sharing this with you as someone who I believe by God's grace and mercy is a trustworthy source of information. That's what he's saying. So how are you, how am I to receive this sort of a statement? It's not a command from God. This is just the Apostle Paul talking.

Well, I think that the answer to that question would be very different if it was Pastor Paul talking. If I came to you and you asked me a question, and frankly this happens a lot, people ask me questions, and I cannot cite a specific biblical passage in my response to them. I will go ahead and just speak to them about their question and tell them, listen, there's nothing in the Bible that I can think of that directly handles your question. So I'm going to just give you my opinion. But I usually tell people, it's just my opinion.

That's all it is. Don't take it as anything more than anyone else's opinion. I don't think that's the way we're going to look at the Apostle Paul's remarks here. And the reason is this. We believe in biblical inspiration.

We believe that the scriptures have been divinely and supernaturally inspired so that the biblical authors spoke to us as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Now again, I can't make that claim as a

pastor. I have to stick to the Word and stick only to the Word. And if I'm not sticking to the Word, I'm going to make it very clear that this is just my opinion and my opinion is no better or worse than anyone else's opinion. But the Apostle Paul is speaking from the standpoint of biblical inspiration.

So when he says, I have no specific command from the Lord regarding this issue of unmarried people, but I'm going to tell you what I think as someone who I believe is trustworthy. He's talking through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And we need to listen to his statements as we would even the very words of Jesus himself. Now I know that might ruffle some feathers, but that is really what biblical inspiration is all about. We believe that the original words by the biblical authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit, literally carried along by the Holy Spirit, so that what they spoke was in fact God's Word, okay?

So now that we've settled that issue, let's go on. Verse 26, I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is, and that means single. Actually it could mean married or single, but you'll notice that he makes reference to the present distress. He does not explain immediately here what that present distress is. We're not told if it's something that was uniquely happening in Corinth for the believers there, nor are we told if Paul is just referring to the general distress of living in a fallen world.

We don't know. But whatever the reason or whatever the distress that he's making reference to, he says, I think you should stay as you are. And so he says in verse 27, 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've not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, and by the way, this is the same Greek word that is used at the outset of our study there in verse 25. He's going to actually use this word several times. And again, it's often translated virgin or maiden.

And so he says, if a betrothed woman… woman is married, she has not sinned. Yet, those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that." Now, this may give us a clue of what he means by present distress. And that is just, he's talking about the simple worldly challenges that go along with being married in a fallen world. So, he's essentially saying in these verses, whatever state you're in, I would probably encourage you just to stay there and not make any major changes in your life. However, if you wanna get married and you decided you're gonna go ahead and get married, it's not a sin, it's not a problem.

So you can see here that the Apostle Paul is giving advice not based on what is right or wrong, or sinful or unsinful. He's talking about what's prudent, what may be best from the standpoint of just what's going on in life, in the world, and so forth. So, we understand what we're talking about here. We

understand that Paul is not giving us comments on what is moral or immoral, okay? These are not sin issues.

He goes on to explain further in verse 29. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. 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 no goods. And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. These can be challenging verses to understand.

And one of the reasons is because this is a form of communication that we don't really use today. Paul is using his words to communicate how this world and all that is part of this world is passing away. So, he's challenging believers to prioritize their lives and to live as if Jesus could return at any time. That is the essence of what these verses mean. We get so focused and fixated on life in this world, going to work, doing what we need to do, day-to-day, purchasing things, traveling.

We become just really very centered on the priorities of living day-to-day. And the Apostle Paul is challenging the believers in Corinth and hence us as well, to change our way of thinking. He's not saying if you're married, don't even pay attention to your wife anymore. I know that's the way it can sound. But again, that's this ancient form of argument that Paul is using here.

No, if you're married, you still have responsibilities in marriage. And he makes reference to that also in this chapter. But what are your priorities? Where are your goals really, truly seated? Are they seated in this life or are they seated in the life to come?

That's the question. And so when he says, live in this life as if what you're doing isn't really important, it's his way of getting believers to focus beyond the present moment, the present challenges, the present needs and concerns, and to live in a state of expectation for the soon arrival of Jesus Christ. This is a good reminder for believers today. I think it was a good reminder for believers back then. Jesus could come at any time and Paul knew that.

He could have come at any time in Paul's life and he could come at any time in your life. That's what we mean when we say the coming of Jesus for his church is imminent. It could happen at any time. There's nothing prophetically that needs to happen before Jesus comes for his church. All right?

Now there are things that need to happen before he comes in his second coming. There are things that need to happen, but not for the rapture, not for the catching away of the church. So given that understanding that the Lord could come at any time, how are we to live? That's what Paul is addressing in these verses. And as challenging as it is to the ears of a modern audience, that's what he's encouraging us to do, to live with different priorities altogether, right?

So he goes on here and he says, I want you to be free from anxieties. I'm in verse 32 now. I want you to be free from anxieties. In other words, I want you to be free from the typical worries that come into the lives of people who are focused and fixated on this temporal world. He says, the unmarried man is anxious or concerned about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.

He doesn't have any other concerns, meritally speaking, because he's a single man. He says, but the married man, verse 33, is anxious or concerned about worldly things, how to please his wife. And his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed, we would probably say engaged woman, all right, is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

And rightly so, because when you get married, you do have to be concerned about how to please your spouse, how to take care of them, how to protect them, how to love them, to cherish them, to honor, to respect them, and so forth. These are things we do gladly when we get married. But Paul is saying, in light of the world that is passing away, I'd rather you didn't have to be concerned about those things. Verse 35, I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. All right, there he explains his whole reason, his whole reason for giving this advice.

I want to help you have an undivided devotion to God. Now, when you get married and you have other worldly concerns, your devotion will be divided because you've got other things going on, all right? Verse 36, now, as we start verse 36, down through verse 38, we're gonna pay close attention to these verses because they are challenging. This is where, really, some translational issues begin to arise. And if you have a different Bible translation than the one I'm reading, and particularly in view now this time, is the New King James or the New American Standard Bible, you're going to get a different sense from these verses than what I am reading here.

So bear with me. I'll read through all these verses, and then we'll talk about it, okay? Verse 36, if anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward the betrothed, and again, that same Greek word that

he started off with in this section, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes. Let them marry. It is no sin.

But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart to keep her as his betrothed, meaning not to go ahead and follow through with the marriage, he will do well. So, then, he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better, again, because of the circumstances he's referring to. And this is where I pick up my tablet because I've got some notes here that are important for me to pass along to you. These verses have some Greek words in them, a particular one Greek word that can be very challenging to render. You know, the Greek language is such that it is so full of meaning that it can have multiple meanings.

A single word in the Greek can actually have different, very different meanings. And so, you might say, well, how do you know? How do you know if it means this or that? Well, Bible translators have to use the context of the passage to do their best to render that word in keeping with the context. And the phrase that is in question in this passage is the phrase here in the ESV, if his passions are strong.

Believe it or not, that's one single Greek word that is rendered if his passions are strong in the ESV. This is a Greek word that can also refer to someone who is past their prime to marry. And that sounds very different in terms of definition than if his passions are strong. But because it can also mean or refer to someone who's past their prime to marry, that's why the New King James and the New American Standard Bible render these verses as if the Apostle Paul is addressing a father who is deciding whether he should give his daughter in marriage. And so, the New King James renders these verses this way.

But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, there's that Greek word. If she is past the flower of youth, there's that Greek word. And thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin. Let them marry.

Nevertheless, he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better. Do you see the difference here? Because the New King James translators chose to render that single Greek word as referring to, in this case, a woman past her prime, it changed the whole complexion of how Paul was addressing or who Paul was addressing in these verses. And it changes it to a father who is considering giving his daughter in marriage.

Again, the New American Standard Bible is very similar in its approach. The ESV renders these verses according to a newer, and I believe better, rendering of them in the sense that the context here is not directed to the woman's father, but rather to the man who is betrothed to the woman. And I believe that what the way the New King James renders it, or the New American Standard Bible renders it, is an older view of these verses that has now largely been overturned by biblical scholars. And I think that the ESV rendering is better in these cases. Okay, verse 39, a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives.

This is nothing new. We've known this for a long time. Paul talks about it in the book of Romans as well. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Did you catch that?

So we've all known that if someone is married and their spouse passes away, that that person is obviously no longer bound in marriage and they are free to remarry. But here Paul adds this small word at the end saying, but only in the Lord. In other words, she must marry a believer. Well, this is a word that's given to all Christians. And we read about it in 2 Corinthians where Paul tells us that as believers, we're not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

So when you're picking out a spouse, you know, make sure that that person is a believer. That applies to widows. It applies to all believers who are yet unmarried and wanting to be married. He goes on to say in verse 40, and this is the final verse of the chapter. Yet in my judgment, she is happier if she remains as she is, meaning single.

And I think that I too have the Spirit of God. That's an interesting statement, isn't it? Probably some sort of a response to what some of the people in Corinth were saying, who perhaps differed in their opinions with the Apostle Paul. Regardless of that, what we see in these last verses of 1 Corinthians chapter 7 is the Apostle Paul addressing things that are not part of commands from the Lord, but are given to us as godly wisdom. He is not saying that he's against marriage.

He's not saying that people shouldn't marry. In fact, he makes it very clear, if you marry, you haven't done anything wrong. He is speaking from the perspective of where your priorities lie. What is important for you in this life? The Apostle Paul lived his life with always, always an eye toward eternity.

He knew of no other way to live his life. I think if we're going to be honest, many Christians today live their lives completely apart from any sort of a focus on eternity. We think about it from time to time. We don't really know what to think because we're not really sure what it's going to be like. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of insight on what eternity is going to be like.

So it's hard to think about such things. And yet the Bible encourages us to think about this life as fleeting, something that's going to pass away, something that is already on its way out. That's difficult, isn't it? But that's the exhortation that we are given here in the Word of God. So we finish out the last portion of 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

We'll pick it up in chapter 8. Next time, let's close our time in prayer. Father, we do thank you so much for this time that we can gather and just get into the Scriptures and really discern the meaning of what's being said here. Help us, we pray, to continue to study, to show ourselves approved, to rightly divide the Word of Truth, to know, to understand, and to apply it correctly. We thank you for our time, and we pray for the time to come that as we gather once again and your Spirit ministers and teaches us that we would be receptive students of the Word of God and your truth.

We pray these things in the authority that is ours through Jesus our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.