

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study: 1 Corinthians 7: 25-40

Review – Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

-What does Paul teach about marriage and divorce in these verses, and how did this build on what Jesus taught about divorce?

- permanence of marriage in general, husbands and wives must not separate/divorce from each other (v.10-11,39)
 - Paul instructs that each person should lead the life that God has assigned & called him to (v.17,20,24)
 - in the context of marriage, for those who were married when called, to remain married (v.10-11)
 - includes those who became believers while married and are now married to an unbelieving spouse (v.12-13)
 - if separation/divorce occurred, the husband & wife should remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to each other (v.11)
 - exception: if an unbelieving spouse wishes to leave, then let him/her leave
- Paul's teachings build on Jesus' teachings on marriage & divorce (e.g. Matthew 19:1-12)
 - Jesus also spoke to the permanence of marriage as God's original intention (Matt. 19:5-6)
 - divorce was permitted due to the hardness of men's hearts (Matt. 19:8)
 - Divorcing your spouse and marrying another constitutes adultery (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:9)
 - Exception: when sexual immorality/adultery had already occurred prior to the divorce

-For those who are married, what are some ways you can be building and strengthening your relationship with your spouse? For those who are unmarried, what are some ways you can be encouraging your married brothers and sisters, and helping them to strengthen their marriages?

-multiple different ways possible – for discussion

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

-What situation does Paul address in this passage verses? How does he advise those in this situation, and how does this build on his teachings in v.17-24?

- “now concerning the betrothed” (v.25)
 - word translated “betrothed” may also be translated, literally, as ‘virgins’
 - most likely, Paul is speaking to the situation where a man engaged to a woman (‘virgin’) but they are not yet married
 - Given questions (see previous studies) about whether Christians should be having sex/getting married at all, some who were engaged may have wondered whether they should get married
- as per his teaching in v.17-24, he counsels people to remain as they are (v.26)
 - those married, not to seek separation/divorce; for those unmarried not to seek marriage (v.27)
 - the ‘betrothed’ seem to be somewhere in between – not entirely married, but not entirely single
 - Paul says he has no specific command/instruction from the Lord on this matter, but provides his advice as someone who is trustworthy (v.25) – i.e. unlike in v.10 & 12, he is not giving a command here, but his opinion/advice
 - advises that it's OK in this situation to get married (v.28,36) or not to (v.27,37), although he thinks it better not to (v.38) (for reasons to be discussed later in this study)

-What is the “present distress” that Paul speaks of, and how should it shape the way we live (v.26ff)?

- Not entirely certain what Paul meant by “the present distress”
 - possibly some local circumstances that were causing particular hardship in Corinth at the time?
 - or some think it may refer to persecution that was either getting started or soon to come
 - perhaps more likely, Paul was referring to the difficulties of the present (fallen, distressed) age in which we live
 - particularly given that we now live in the last days/end times before Christ's return
 - “the appointed time has grown very short” (v.29); “the present form of this world is passing away (v.31)
- in view of this present distress, Paul counsels people to remain as they are, as he did before (v.v.17-24, 26-27)
 - Particularly if unmarried, he encourages them not to seek marriage
 - clarifies that getting married is not a bad thing; that it's not a sin to marry (v.28)
 - but wishes to spare them the “worldly troubles” that married people have (v.28)
- Whether married or unmarried, we are to live our lives in view of the present distress/the time being short
 - not to make the situations in which we find ourselves the ultimate be-all/end-all of our lives, whether married or single
 - e.g. those who have wives, as though they had none (v.29)
 - not engrossed with the world or the things of the world, or the circumstances in which we find ourselves (v.30-31)
 - whatever our situation, to be living in ‘undivided devotion to the Lord’ (v.35)
 - not intended “to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord” (v.35)

- According to Paul and in your own experience, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of being single?
- What are some 'worldly troubles' (v. 28) that married people might have, that unmarried people don't?
 - primary advantage of being single – ability to give undivided attention to 'the things of the Lord' (v.32,34), in a way that married people cannot
 - 'how to please the Lord' (v.32); 'how to be holy in body and spirit' (v.34)
 - which is why Paul counsels the unmarried to remain so if possible, and says it's 'better' to remain unmarried (v.38,40)
 - but this is only advantageous if one is able to control one's passions (v.36; also v.8-9)
 - better to marry than to burn with passion
 - singleness also is not necessarily advantageous (in light of the shortness of our time), if it's just a way of living life that is focused on self, rather than on the Lord
 - marriage can be a help in dealing with sexual temptation (7:1-9), but comes with 'worldly troubles' (v.28)
 - referring primarily to the need to devote attention to pleasing one's spouse, rather than fully on pleasing the Lord → "divided interests" (v.33-34)
 - these are legitimate concerns and need to be paid attention to, in the context of marriage
 - e.g. time spent caring for wife & children; taking care of household affairs
 - but does mean less time & freedom to devote self to serving the Lord in other ways
 - but 'worldly troubles' also could include trouble/conflict with your spouse, in-laws, children, etc.
 - these are things that unmarried people are largely free of

-What does Paul say about remarriage, in v.39-40?

- marriage is binding on both husband and wife until one dies
- If your spouse passes away, you are free to remarry, "only in the Lord" (i.e. only to another believer, if you are a believer)
 - yet, Paul thinks it better if the widow remains unmarried (v.40)

-Whether single or married, what are some concrete ways we can apply the principles taught in these verses to our lives today?

- single-minded devotion to God
- those who are married typically have more 'worldly' concerns than those who are unmarried (e.g. caring for spouse, children)
 - these are legitimate concerns, but are not to be ultimate/paramount – the Lord is (v.29-31)
 - need to understand and discharge our responsibility to spouse & family in proper context of undivided devotion to the Lord (v.35)
 - not a free pass to neglect our other responsibilities to God and His people
 - singleness is better than marriage only insofar as it means greater ability to live with undivided interests about the things of the Lord (v.32,34)
 - need to take care & be intentional, not to 'waste' your singleness on self-centered pursuits, but in undivided devotion to the Lord

Reflection and application

Marriage and singleness are both precious gifts from God (1 Cor 7:7), each with its own benefits. While marriage provides companionship and the only legitimate expression the "one flesh" (i.e. sexual) relationship, singleness allows for more time and energy to be devoted to doing the Lord's work (7:32-35). Married or single, however, God calls us all to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves, and to give ourselves unreservedly to Him, as those who know that the time is short (7:15-31). Are you single? Then learn to be content as a single, savouring the "one spirit" relationship you have with Christ (1 Cor 6:17), and giving your undivided devotion to the service of your Lord, whether you remain single or are moving towards marriage. Are you married? Learn to be content and to live in peace with your spouse (7:15), devoting yourselves first to the Lord, then to one another.