

1 CORINTHIANS 7.25-40

Remain As You Were Called (2)

Intro: Throughout 7.1-24 the idea of “remaining” is found. The unmarried and widows should “remain” as they were (vs. 8). The married should remain in their marriages (vs. 10, 12-13). As a general principle, Christians should remain as they had been called, focusing on serving the Lord in whatever station in life they found (vss. 17-24). Beginning in vs. 25, Paul addresses another situation they had inquired about: the marriage of virgins. As we will see, Paul’s advice to them was the same: remain as you are.

VS. 25, NOW CONCERNING VIRGINS

1. Depending on your translation, 7.25-40 will read differently. Some will read the situation as a man giving his “virgin daughter” in marriage (such as the NASB). Others read the passage as referring to a man marrying his virgin fiancée (such as the ESV).
2. I follow the NASB’s reading, seeing the passage as referring to a man giving his virgin daughter in marriage. Father’s exerted great control over their daughters, and given the Corinthians’ numerous questions about marriage, it would be natural for them to also inquire about giving their daughters in marriage.
3. Paul begins addressing this situation by saying, “I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion...”
 - » Similar to the situation described in vss. 12-16, Paul is addressing an issue where Jesus never gave an express command. However, Paul’s opinion in this is not the simple opinion of a man, but:
 - One who by God’s mercy is trustworthy. Significant that in other places Paul refers to his apostleship is the Lord’s mercy.
 - Refers to his opinion in vs. 40 as well,

but adds that he also has the Spirit of God.

- » Note that his overall advice is the exact same that he had given in the other cases (unmarried, married, married to unbelievers): remain as you are!

VSS. 26-38, REMAIN AS YOU ARE

1. Due to the “present distress”, they should remain as they are (vss. 26-28).
 - » We are not told what the present distress was, but we can rule out two things:
 - Could not be the normal pressures of being a Christian, or Paul’s counsel in 1Timothy 5.14 that young widows should marry would be nonsense.
 - Is not referring to the end of the world, for Paul is referring to something happening at that time. Significant that the term translated “distress” is used by Jesus in Matthew 24.21 in speaking of events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and it is used by Paul when speaking of the persecutions he endured (1Thess 3.7).
 - » So, it seems best to read this as some form of persecution the Corinthians were currently experiencing.
 - » Due to this persecution, Paul’s counsel is that all remain as they are. Those bound (deo, the marriage bond) to a wife, should remain married. Those unbound, should not seek to marry, although they had not sinned if they did choose to marry.
2. How they should conduct themselves since the time was shortened (vss. 29-31)
 - » What does Paul mean by the time being shortened? The following from Leon Morris is helpful: “Both in his earlier and his

later epistles he uses the second advent to inspire people to blameless conduct (e.g. 1 Thess. 5:1–11; Phil. 1:9–11). The note of present crisis, so marked here, is absent. Those who see the second advent here never seem to face the question of why the last generation should live differently from any others. We all face the same judgment. It is best to see a reference to prevailing circumstances at Corinth (the ‘crisis’ of v. 26). The culmination was evidently not far off; in this troubled period many kinds of conduct must be transformed. In particular those who have wives must be ‘as those who have none’.”

- » Paul’s point in this section is that during this time of distress, normal behavior cannot be the norm!
3. The benefit of remaining unmarried (vss. 32–35)
- » That Paul still has their present distress in mind would seem evident from Paul’s opening words, “I want you to be free from concern.” Paul’s counsel here must be read in this light, not as an injunction against marriage for all time, but godly advice given during a time of great distress.
 - » It is unfortunate that this passage has been used to promote celibacy as a higher degree of holiness. “If one seeks to use verse 34, ‘that she may be holy both in body and in spirit,’ to say that the virgin is holier than the married woman, his effort contradicts Hebrews 13:4, ‘Let marriage be had in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled.’ Such an interpretation also raises the interesting question: Was Paul, then, holier than Peter? Paul was unmarried, while Peter had a wife (1Cor. 9:4). Paul affirmed his right to lead about a wife that is a believer (1Cor. 9:5). He had simply chosen not to take advantage of that right because of the circumstances in which he found himself as he traveled about in his preaching and faced the persecutions that came his way.” (Bob Waldron)

- » However, we can also be guilty of over-emphasizing marriage, acting as if a Christian is incomplete if unmarried. Not so! Their calling is a holy one, of devotion to Christ.
4. Counsel to those with virgin daughters (vss. 36–38). Having made his point about the value of remaining undistracted to the Lord, Paul applies this to the situation he had begun to address in vs. 25. His point is easy to understand: a man had not sinned by allowing his virgin daughter to marry, but given the present circumstances, a man would do better if he did not give his daughter in marriage.

VSS. 39-40, REGARDING WIDOWS

1. Paul’s basic counsel was the same: stay as you are. He first emphasizes the general rule of God’s marriage law: a husband and wife are bound (deo) together so long as they live. However, death ends that bond, leaving open the possibility of remarriage.
2. Opinions differ regarding the meaning of the phrase, “only in the Lord.” Does this mean 1) she must marry another Christian or 2) she may marry again, so long as she follows the Lord’s will. I confess to not knowing for sure, although I lean toward Paul saying the remarriage should be to a Christian. Given the distressing circumstances and the need to remain focused on the Lord, it would not make much sense for a woman to marry an unbeliever during these difficult times. I cannot be dogmatic, saying that all widows can only marry believers, but the principle applies to any who would marry. Will your spouse help or hinder your relationship with God?