

1 Corinthians Series #21
"The Time Is Short" - 1 Cor. 7:25-40

I. INTRODUCTION

A. RR

B. A Lot Of Ground To Cover Today

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 25

25 Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.

1. In questions about marriage, had asked what should be done with the young girls in their families
2. Paul turns to that question
3. In earlier part of the ch. he laid down clear teaching on marriage, divorce, and celibacy
 - a. celibacy preferred if person had gift
 - b. if not, be married
 - c. I won't repeat — listen to the tape
4. Question about what to do with virgins a different question
 - a. what he'd talked about before was personal choices
 - b. this question about virgins a different issue because someone else was making the decision about marriage for them
5. In ancient world, parents arranged the marriages of their children
 - a. they would find a prospective mate
 - b. make arrangements with the other parents
 - c. it would all be set up without much input on kids part
6. When Paul speaks of virgins here, he means a virgin daughter, and who he's speaking to is her parents
7. And as before, in v. 12, Paul identifies that Christ has never spoken directly on this subject
 - a. nevertheless, Paul believes his counsel is good
 - b. and to be heeded
 - c. and apparently it is, because God preserved this letter and made sure it was included in the bible

8. Vs. 26-35 give the reasons why the Corinthians should accept Paul's advice
 - a. we'll come back to them
 - b. but first, let's jump on down to v. 36 where he continues

B. Vs. 36-38

36 But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.

1. Fathers had a strong voice in their daughters lives
2. It was not uncommon for a father to, instead of setting her up with a husband, to devote her to a life of celibacy
3. We know that this was a practice especially common in the early church
4. What Paul is saying is here an extension of what he said about marriage earlier to older men and women
5. He says . . .
 - a. it's fine if a father wants to devote his daughter to a celibate life
 - b. but if when she comes of age, it is clear that she has does not have the gift of celibacy, marry her off
6. Paul knows that the father may think the vow he has taken for his daughter is inviolable
 - a. he's afraid if he lets his daughter marry he will be sinning
 - b. Paul says, "NO!"

37 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.

7. Don't let the terms here confuse you
8. Very simply, Paul is speaking about a father making up his mind on what is best for his daughter
9. If he has taken a vow of celibacy for his virgin daughter and she gets to the age of marriage and she seems quite content to remain single, then he must not waver in his mind
10. He's done the right thing and should stick to it
11. For Paul, the critical issue is not the father's stubbornness; it's whether or not the gal is meant by God to be celibate

- a. so in v. 36 he says of the girl who should get married, "thus it must be."
- b. in v.37 of the girl who is to remain single, "having no necessity."

38 So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.

- 12. What Paul is talking about here is not really an issue of right and wrong so much as it is a question of what is good and what is best
 - 13. Paul's preoccupation was the glory of God and he believed the single life provided more opportunities for doing the work of God's kingdom
 - 14. That's what he talks about in vs. 26-35
- C. Vs. 26-35

26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress; that it is good for a man to remain as he is:

- 1. Here he repeats what we looked at last week
- 2. We are to live for God as we are called
 - a. we are not to agitate for a change of circumstances before we start serving God
 - b. rather, we are to serve God in the midst of our present situation
 - c. we are to be a Christian where we are
- 3. The question arises though as to what he means by, **"the present distress"**
 - a. the word **distress** means "crushing stress" or "calamity"
 - b. at the time Paul wrote this, persecution of Christians was just beginning to heat up to a fevered pitch in the Roman Empire.
 - a few years after this letter was written, Nero came on the scene
 - he was diabolical in his persecution of believers
 - he used to sew them up in raw animal skins and then throw them into a pack of wild dogs
 - he would clothe them in garments soaked in wax, tie them to the tops of poles placed around his garden, and then light them on fire as lights in the night for him to ride his chariot around

- but even at the time Paul wrote, persecution was heating up
 - he would know, he had led in some of the first persecution in Jerusalem
 - Christians were arrested, their goods confiscated, their families broken up
 - imprisoned, beaten, tortured, and executed
 - and if not outright persecution, then grave prejudice against them
 - many tradesmen could not work
4. In light of that kind of stress, changing one's marital status would just add more pressure to one's life

27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

5. Here's where we get to see the motivation behind Paul's counsel
6. He wants to help people avoid unnecessary stress in their lives
- a. and he knew that marriage is often a source of stress
 - b. "AMEN!"
7. Now, some people get the idea that Paul is disparaging of marriage
- a. but that is not the case
 - b. he is simply being a realist
 - c. he is saying that a person who wants to get married should go ahead and get married
 - d. while the person who is single and content should stay single
8. Why then does he spend so much time on this subject?
- a. because he wants to affirm those who are called to be celibate to stay single
 - b. you see, Paul knew that society and large, and the church in particular, tends to look at singleness as a temporary set-back to real life
 - c. so he shows a preference toward singleness to encourage the celibate
 - d. at the same time, he doesn't want to be accused of being guilty of reverse prejudice against marriage

9. For Paul, the chief question was this: What is best for you to be faithful to God and to be busy with the His work?
 - a. singleness?
 - or-
 - b. marriage?

29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, 30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, 31 and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.

10. Paul cuts to the chase here
11. The reason we must all serve the Lord now, and not wait until our circumstances change, is because the time is short
12. We are not guaranteed tomorrow, let alone next month or next year
13. Paul has been faulted for his statement here that the *time was short*
 - a. his critics jump on the bandwagon of saying that he expected the Lord to return at any moment
 - b. and since he was wrong we can cheerfully forget everything he wrote here
14. It's clear from other passages that Paul did indeed expect Jesus to come again at any time
 - a. but that belief was not based on a weird or distorted view of prophecy and current events
 - b. it was based on the fact that Jesus had instructed his followers to watch and be ready, because he was coming again at a time they least expected
 - c. so Paul lived as though the time was short, because that is the way Jesus had said we are to live
 - in fact, Jesus encouraged his followers to live with a sense of urgency about His return
 - John 9:4 **"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."**
 - Mat 24:44 **"Be ready, for the Son of Man is**

coming at an hour you do not expect."

15. Have you ever been thinking back over your past and all of a sudden, in a flash of illumination, you see your whole life as having been just a short moment of time
 - a. when you were a kid of 8, 30 seemed to be ancient
 - b. time seemed to crawl by at a snail's pace
 - c. but now that you're older, you look back to your teens and they seem just a short time ago
16. There are times when we get a glimpse of the transitory nature of time itself
 - a. and we suddenly realize how fleeting life is, how quickly this moment passes
 - b. For a brief moment we are able to pierce the veil of time and we realize that this whole scene is passing away
 - c. and then we wonder, "What have I really done with my life?"
17. I think that is what Paul is speaking about in these verses
 - a. he is calling us to make our choices in life based not on the merely temporal but the eternal
 - b. why? because this world and the things of this world are passing away
 - c. and we, as members of the kingdom of heaven, are eternal
18. That's why he says, **"from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it.**
 - a. he is not calling for some kind of Christian nirvana or stoicism where we are untouched by emotion
 - b. in another place he says that we are to enjoy the good things God gives us
 - c. he also says we are to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice
 - d. what he is calling for here is an attitude of heart and mind that is not distracted by that which will ultimately pass away
 - e. we must not become preoccupied with the merely temporary

- f. rather we must fix our hearts and minds on the eternal
 - g. and temper our decisions by what lasts
 - h. Col 3:2 **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.**
 - i. children are often excited or bummed out by things that adults have learned to take in stride
 - some time ago, Tyrell made a large fort with some blocks in the family room
 - he was quite excited by it and proudly showed it off to his mother and I
 - then along came his older brother; and you can guess what happened
 - Luke decided to remodel it
 - Tyrell lost it!
 - now, Lynn & I rejoiced with him in his creativity, but our rejoicing was more for his sake than that actual joy on our part.
 - after all, it was in the middle of the floor and would have to be cleaned up within a couple hours at the most
 - we were sad at his loss when Luke decided to play King Kong, but again, our sorrow was more for his sake than for a sense of real loss
 - our emotions were tempered because we realized the transitory nature of what he had spent so much time and energy in
19. It is a sign of spiritual maturity to be able to step back from the cares of this life and see it all from the eternal perspective

32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord; how he may please the Lord.

33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world; how he may please his wife.

34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world; how she may please her husband.

- 20. Here again as before, Paul is NOT demeaning marriage
- 21. What he is doing is affirming singles
- 22. He knew the pressure that is applied to single people to get married
 - a. and he knew that many of those who were

- single were called by God to be celibate
- b. what he does here is to show the great potential those who are single have to serve the Lord in a way married people cannot
- 23. I think it's obvious that a person who is married is called by God to serve their mate.
 - a. Eph. 5: Wives, submit to your husbands
Husbands, love your wives
 - b. But singles are not under that calling
 - c. their calling is to be married to the Lord, full time, serving Him as one would a mate
- 24. The heart of what Paul is driving at is found in v. 35

35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

- 25. The bottom line was that they might serve the Lord without distraction
 - a. marriage can be a distraction
 - b. it is often difficult for two people, who are sinners, to merge their lives into the oneness that is the essence of marriage
- 26. So, if a person is called by God to be single, then don't become distracted by the unnecessary distraction of marriage
- 27. But, if a person is called to marriage, then they should get married
 - a. because the single life will provide a bigger distraction than marriage,
 - b. as many of us who were once single but longed to be married can attest to

D. Vs. 39-40

- 1. Paul concludes his words on this subject in vs. 39 & 40 with some comments to widows

39 A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

40 But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment; and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

- 2. Death severs the bonds of marriage
- 3. Marriage is a temporary solution to the problem of loneliness
- 4. Contrary to what some of the cults teach, there is no

marriage in heaven

- a. Jesus said that in heaven there is no marriage between human beings
- b. that is just for this life
5. We will be united with Christ as His Bride, and marriage now among men and women is but a foreshadowing of that great future
6. So Paul says that a Christian widow is free to remarry, as long as the one she marries is a Christian guy
7. But again, Paul would encourage the widows to stop and consider the single life before they plunge back into marriage

III. CONCLUSION

A. Five Weeks

1. We have spent 5 weeks in ch. 7
2. 5 weeks looking at the subject of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the single life
3. We have learned a lot about the principles that govern marriage and divorce
4. But for Paul, the critical issue was not marriage or celibacy, it was serving the Lord now
5. Living for Christ today because the time is short

B. The Time Is Short

1. Paul did expect the Lord to return soon
2. Christians throughout the history of the church have expected the Lord to come soon
3. Many of us expect the Lord to return soon
4. Why? Because Jesus told us to expect Him to return soon
5. And one thing is certain, His coming is certainly sooner than in the time of Paul, or a hundred years ago, or even a year ago.
6. Bible prophecy is one of my favorite subjects
 - a. I have tried to stay abreast of what is happening in the world
 - b. as well as being a careful student of what the bible says about the last days
 - c. I am convinced that Jesus is coming for His church very soon
 - d. in fact, I wouldn't be surprised if He were to come today
 - e. you know why? I'm watching and waiting for Him to come — just as he told us to watch and be ready.

C. Are You Ready?