

The unfolding of your words gives light.

The Temple of God

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

²⁵Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy^a. ²⁶I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is^b. ²⁷Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife^c. ²⁸But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned^d. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you^e. ²⁹But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on

^a 7:25 **Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.** Paul's "now concerning" tells us that this is one more matter about which the church had written (see 7:1). This is the fourth and last marital status listed in this chapter after "unmarried," "widows" and "married": "virgins." This is the word used to point out that the mother of Jesus had never been with a man. As it is used here it refers to those who have never married and, by implication, those who have never had sex.

This "opinion" of Paul is not an admission that his letter was not authoritative. It explains that the Lord's teaching on this subject is not to be found anywhere else in Scripture.

^b 7:26 **I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is.** This text is an example of the importance of interpreting the Bible within its context. You should consider literary, historic, grammatical, cultural and theological context. Here the word "present" puts the first application of these verses in first century Corinth. The word translated "distress" (*anagke*) was used by Jesus (Luke 21:23) to describe the great necessity that would come on Jerusalem at its destruction in A.D. 70. We do not know for sure what Paul spoke of here, but he may have referred to the widespread famine that affected much of the Roman empire in the middle of the first century. More likely he spoke of the martyrdom that awaited so many believers. Nero was just getting warmed up when these words were written.

This does not mean there is no application for you. Here is Paul's premarital counsel: Make sure you know what you're getting yourself into.

^c 7:27 **Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.** This echoes the three statements of the previous part of this study: *Be content where you are.*

^d 7:28 **But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.** As he will do in coming chapters of this letter, Paul points out that Christians have liberty to make some decisions that are not in the *right or wrong* category. This is a call to make decisions carefully.

Correctly interpreting "you" in this verse give you an authoritative answer to the question *Who may marry within the boundaries of God's blessing?* He started out talking to virgins and then expanded his audience in verse 27. Those who are widowed, biblically divorced and those who have never married are not sinning if they marry.

^e 7:28 **Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.** The word "trouble" can be translated *pressure* or even *tribulation*. That is not to say that Paul believed marriage is a big fight. The pressure related to a specific trial facing first century believers.

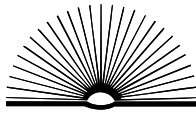
I have heard this compared to a soldier preparing to head off to war with great likelihood of becoming a casualty. Should he marry before he leaves or not? Even in our day we ought to call singles to recognize that marriage brings "trouble" that singleness does not.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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The unfolding of your words gives light,³⁰

those who have wives should be as though they had none;³⁰ and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess;³¹ and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it^g; for the form of this world is passing away^h.

³²But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lordⁱ; ³³but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, ³⁴and *his interests* are divided^j. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband^k. ³⁵This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.^{l,m}

^f 7:29 **But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none.** The word “shortened” means *to wrap up* or *to enshroud*. The only other New Testament use described the way the body of Ananias (Acts 5:6) was wrapped up and carried away for burial after God killed him. Here it probably means that many of the original auditors of this letter would have foreshortened lives. If you know you do not have much time you look at life’s priorities differently.

^g 7:30-31 **and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it.** Paul told Timothy (1 Timothy 6:7) that we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out of it. Here is the same idea. All the things they stressed over, mourned about and worked hard to attain would soon be gone. Then what?

^h 7:31 **for the form of this world is passing away.** Our lives are vapors. John said something very similar:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17

ⁱ 7:32 **But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.** The word translated “free from concern” is used only one other time in the New Testament (Matthew 28:14). There the chief priests bribed the guards of Jesus’ empty tomb and promised to “keep” them “out of trouble” with Pilate. The related verb “concerned” (*merimnao*) is the fear, worry and anxiety word Jesus used five times at the end of Matthew 6.

When you are single you are in a better position to focus on pleasing the Lord.

^j 7:33-34 **but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and *his interests* are divided.** The married person does not have the option to live a life independent of his or her mate.

^k 7:34 **The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.** Notice that Paul speaks to the “unmarried, and the virgin.” He includes those who were once married along with those who have never been married. This holiness “in body and spirit” is not a reference to purity but to being set apart. A married woman can be just as pure as a single woman but she has great responsibilities that a single woman does not have.

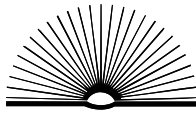
^l 7:35 **This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord.** This “undistracted” attention

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to the Lord ought to be your primary goal if you are single. The positive form of this word described Martha's *distractions* with her kitchen work when she complained that Mary should have been helping instead of listening to Jesus (Luke 10:40). Mary chose the better thing: undistracted devotion.

Rather than living in the fantasy of ending your singleness with a trophy spouse, you have the option to seek contentment.

^m 7:25-35 There is an urgency to this text that may have been limited to that particular circumstance but also applies in our world. Just because something is not sinful does not mean it is the best choice. We ought to encourage biblical singleness. Counsel to singles:

1. Surround yourself with trustworthy counselors.
2. Count the cost before you marry.
3. Resist the temptation to live selfishly.
4. Cultivate the heart of a servant.

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