

1Corinthians 7C (2013)

- Let's conclude Paul's discussion on Christian marriage
 - The final section of chapter 7 continues to build on the theme Paul has repeated three times in this chapter
 - A Christian is not to seek some different station in life simply as a result of receiving salvation
 - God saved us for reasons of His own, so we don't need to construct some new, idealized Christian lifestyle
 - We only need to live to please the Lord Who bought us
 - Last week Paul stated the principle for the third time in the final verse from last week's lesson

1Cor. 7:24 Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.

- We remain "with God" when we remain in the condition in which we were as He called us
- Paul doesn't mean we can't ever change the place we live or the occupation we have, etc.
- He means our salvation doesn't - by itself - demand that we upend out entire life to serve God
- We can serve Him right where we are
- We have this confidence because we know that all the important issues of our sin and our salvation have been already settled on the cross

A wealthy man moved into a small community and decided to go to the local barber shop for a shave.

He walked into the barber shop to find that the local barber was a woman, named Grace. Grace gave the man a shave, and he asked her, "How much do I owe you?" She said "\$25."

The man thought that was somewhat expensive and that he may have to get a shave every other day. Nonetheless, he paid Grace and went on his way.

The next day, he woke up and found his face to be just as smooth as the day before. No need for a shave today, he thought, well, it was a \$25 shave.

The next day he awoke to find his face as smooth as the day before. Wow! he thought. That's amazing, as he normally would need to shave daily to keep his clean-shaven business look.

Day 3, he woke up and his face was still as smooth as the minute after Grace had finished. Now, somewhat perplexed, the man went down to the barber shop to ask some questions. On this particular day he found the town pastor sitting in the barber shop waiting for a haircut, so the wealthy man struck up a conversation with the pastor asking if the pastor knew how it was that his face could remain so smooth for so long after he was shaved. The kind old pastor gently explained, "Friend, you were shaved by Grace ... and once shaved, always shaved."

- The permanence of our faith and salvation underlies everything Paul is teaching in this chapter
 - We can have confidence to remain in our present condition for as long as God requires because our condition has no impact on our salvation
- From this point, Paul now addresses his final teaching point on marriage

1Cor. 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.

1Cor. 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.

1Cor. 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.

1Cor. 7:28 But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you.

- As he did earlier in the letter, Paul qualifies his instructions, but unlike he earlier qualification, this time he makes clear there is no mandate here
 - He says this instruction is not something Jesus Himself gave
 - But even more, Paul says he is giving an opinion
 - Paul is saying that the Christian is not bound by this counsel as if it were a command
 - Nevertheless, it is scripture, so it is wise and trustworthy counsel
 - That counsel is that Christians not seek to change their marital status in view of the present distress

- If you are unmarried, then it may be best to remain that way
- If you are married already, then certainly do not violate your marriage vows by ending the marriage
- In other words, remain as you are
 - Do not become distracted by such things as marriage when more important, eternal concerns present themselves
- For the one who chooses to ignore Paul's counsel, Paul makes clear that person will not be sinning by taking a wife or husband
 - The opportunity to marry is never an act of sin in itself
 - But Paul says his counsel comes out of a personal concern for the believer in light of the world situation
 - He knew that the burdens and responsibilities of marriage would add to the stress of the present time
 - So he says he was trying to spare the believer the sorrow that would come
- As we hear Paul's words, we're left asking how applicable are these instructions to us today?
 - First, take note that Paul says his counsel is based on a sober assessment of the "present distress"
 - The present distress refers to the persecution that Paul and other Christians knew in his day
 - Believers were beginning to suffer at the hands of Jews for their faith
 - And Paul also knew that the days would grow even worse when the Roman's joined in that persecution
 - Once persecution took hold throughout the empire, Christian families were subjected to the worst imaginable tortures and martyrdom
 - Families were crucified
 - Fed to wild animals in spectator games
 - Burned alive at the stake in a practice known as Roman candles

- Facing such suffering alone is bad enough
- But to be a father or mother and to watch helplessly as these things come upon your spouse or children is beyond our comprehension
- Paul understood this dilemma, so he counsels that the church consider avoiding such a dilemma altogether
- On the other hand, we have two clear reasons why we know Paul wouldn't expect all Christians to follow this advice
 - First, the present distress Paul cited is not universally true for all Christians
 - Not all Christians experience persecution of the level Paul experienced
 - Not all Christians are faced with persecution in their age or location
 - The churches in Paul's day were under such a threat
 - And many churches in our day face similar levels of persecution in places like China, North Korea, and in many Arab states
 - And in a future day, world-wide persecution will return as the end nears
 - But many churches today and throughout the centuries have existed in relatively peaceful circumstances
 - So Paul's counsel is not a mandate for all Christians...it depends on our circumstances
- Secondly, we know Paul would not have expected every Christian to follow this advice, for if Christians never married, then the Christian life would be skewed toward singleness to an unhelpful degree
 - We see clearly that the Lord works through Christian parents often to raise godly children
 - While God must bring faith to every heart regardless of the family setting, nevertheless it's evident He delights to bring faith to children raised in a godly home
 - So we can safely assume that it would go against God's purposes for every Christian to refrain from marriage

- So if we choose to marry, that's fine
 - But if we find ourselves in a difficult place and time, where our faith puts us at risk, we should consider Paul's counsel carefully
 - There is added burden that comes upon a man or woman trying to follow Christ within the context of a marriage
 - We are burdened by the responsibility to our spouse
 - We are constrained by our concern for their wellbeing
 - And we are distracted by worries over how our faith will lead to persecution
 - These burdens may outweigh the benefits of companionship, especially if we have a calling to evangelism or mission work where we will be in harm's way
 - Keep eyes for eternity
 - As Paul says to Timothy:

[2Tim. 2:3](#) Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

[2Tim. 2:4](#) No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

- Still, we expect that many if not most of us will choose to marry, as is our option
 - Should we take this course and should the times and circumstances change for the worse, then we'll have some difficult choices to make
 - So now Paul explains how we are to respond to those situations, as difficult as it may be

[1Cor. 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;

[1Cor. 7:30](#) 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;

[1Cor. 7:31](#) and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away.

[1Cor. 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;

[1Cor. 7:33](#) but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife,

[1Cor. 7:34](#) and his interests are divided. 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.

[1Cor. 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.

- Paul's advice to married Christian couples begins with a curious reference to the days in which we live
 - Paul says the times have been shortened
 - The Greek word translated "shortened" is a complex idea
 - The word can mean wrapped up or covered over, like strings drawn together to close the mouth of a money sack
 - So in that sense it can be translated shortened, but that doesn't really give a full understanding of Paul's meaning
 - Think instead of the mouth of that bag tightening, constricting as well as the strings becoming shorter
 - Paul is emphasizing the nature of these last days before Christ's return
 - The time until His return is growing shorter by the day, like a fuse burning to the end
 - And at the same time, the opening is closing
 - The word represents both the fleeting and ever diminishing opportunity to serve Christ
 - As well as the increasing pressure and persecution of a noose being tightened around the Church
- These are the days all Christians know to some degree
 - We can't escape this reality, and though it will strike each of us differently, nevertheless we must give thought to what these days means for our service to Christ
 - Paul says we who marry must be willing to live as if we are not married
 - Paul isn't asking us to abandon our wives or husbands for the sake of the Gospel

- But in terms of our affections and priorities, we must be willing to follow Christ's commands without allowing our marital commitment to stand in the way of obedience
- If the Lord asks us to devote our life to serving Him in a dangerous overseas location, would we say yes to the Lord if we were single?
 - Then we must be willing to say yes to Him if we are married and have children
 - We can't use our married life as excuse to say no to the Lord's call
- That's the price we pay for choosing to marry in view of these difficult times
- That's how Paul explains the logic of his advice in vs.32-34
 - He says he wants us to be free of concern, meaning the concern we naturally have for a spouse
 - If we are married, whether husband or wife, then naturally we have our attention and allegiances divided
 - This is true even when our spouse is a believer who also wants to follow the Lord
 - The reality of marriage is that we care for the other person to a degree that causes us to second guess the Lord's call
 - And Paul is trying to help us follow the Lord with the least distraction possible
- This principle of serving Christ free from divided attention extends far beyond the restrictions of marriage
 - In v.30, Paul says we cannot allow the sorrows and disappointments of this life to become excuse for not serving God
 - In Paul's day, Christians often experienced the sorrow of losing a loved one to persecution or suffering economic distress for their faith
 - Paul says if we have such sorrows, we must continue serving Christ as if we have only joys

- Conversely, if we are living in luxury and comfort, we cannot allow the pursuit or maintenance of such things stand in the way of serving Christ
 - Remember the words of Christ

[Matt. 19:21](#) Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

[Matt. 19:22](#) But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

- We cannot allow any affections in this life, whether family comforts or lifestyle, become an excuse to ignore the call of the Lord
- Every lifestyle decision we make will impact our obedience to the Lord
 - If our spouse demands we provide a certain degree of comfort or lifestyle, it will constrain our ability to serve the Lord
 - If we are determined to provide an expensive education for our kids or to live in only the best neighborhood, we’ll be forced to pursue certain jobs
 - If we value our lifestyle over sacrificially serving the Lord, we’ll spend our energy and free time on the wrong things
- Every decision we make for where we spend our time, money and energy means something else is losing out
 - And when we’re married, some of our time, money and energy must be spent on our spouse and children, as it should be
 - We remember that Paul emphasized that this choice is not sin
 - We have every right to take a spouse and have a family
 - And if we do, then we must give them the required time and attention
 - But neither should we be naive about how this choice impacts our service to Christ
 - And Paul speaking from experience counsels that we give some consideration to the possibility that our life will best serve the Lord if we remain free of such distractions

- Finally, in the principle of remaining as we are, Paul addresses one final issue of marriage in the church

1Cor. 7:36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

1Cor. 7:37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well.

1Cor. 7:38 So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

1Cor. 7:39 A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.

1Cor. 7:40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

- This passage is unnecessarily confusing because of a poor choice on the part of some English translators
 - The word “daughter” is not found in the original text
 - The KJV, NIV, NKJV, and many others get this correct, while my version (the NASB) misses the mark for some reason
 - The virgin in this passage is not the man’s daughter
 - She is his fiancé
 - Remember, in Paul’s day a marriage began with a betrothal, which we might call an engagement
 - But unlike today, the engagement was a much more solemn relationship that could not be easily broken
 - So Paul is addressing the situation where a man is currently betrothed to a virgin but he has heard Paul’s teaching and is contemplating remaining unmarried
 - What should such a man do? Go through with the marriage or remain single?
 - Once again for this delicate situation, Paul gives very sensitive advice

- First, he says if you believe you are acting in an dishonoring way to the woman, and assuming she is already of marrying age, then he should go through with the marriage
 - On the other hand, if a man can pass three tests, he is in a position to forgo marriage and remain single in serving the Lord can stand firm in his heart
 - First, the man must be able to stand firm in his own heart
 - He must be sure that this is a conviction brought by the Lord
 - He's not trying to impress anyone or appear pious
 - He is convinced in a manner that reflects a faith-led decision
 - He is prepared for a life of singleness and he is convicted of that call
 - Secondly, if the man understands he is under no constraint
 - The word of God does not require the man forgo marriage
 - And neither does any man dictate this choice for us, not even Paul himself
 - This is a choice we make in freedom, not as a result of Law
 - Thirdly, the man has authority over his own will concerning the matter
 - The question here is whether the man has made promises or entered into binding agreements concerning the marriage
 - If he has, then he no longer has authority over his own will in this situation
 - He is bound by his previous commitments
 - If he can pass these tests, then Paul says at the end of v.37 he does well to leave the fiancé a virgin and to serve the Lord in singleness
 - Likewise, if the man cannot pass these tests and decides to give the women in marriage (to himself), then he is not sinning either
 - Once again Paul says we do not sin when we choose to marry
 - This isn't an issue of right vs. wrong

- It's a choice between good and better, depending on our circumstances
 - So in v.38 Paul says it is well to do one and better to do the other
- In like fashion, Paul flips the coin over and addresses a woman's options with a similar outcome
 - In Paul's day, a woman had few choices concerning marriage
 - Her father chose her husband
 - And she had no legal right to pursue a divorce, not that divorce was an option in any case
 - But it's in light of these social constraints that Paul says a woman must remain bound to her husband for as long as he lives (back to the one flesh principle of scripture)
 - But if she becomes a widow, then she has a choice to make
 - She is now free to be married to anyone she wishes
 - She is no longer under her father's authority and without a husband, she makes her own decisions
 - To that woman, Paul says she may marry anyone she wishes except only in the Lord
 - Paul is saying that a widow's decision to remarry must be in keeping with the Lord's will
 - And that includes not only whether to marry but who to marry
 - And as we learned last week that means marrying only believers
 - But as Paul told the men, if the widow chooses to remain unmarried at that point, she will be happier
 - Paul isn't suggesting marriage makes us unhappy
 - He's speaking again of the benefits of serving Christ unencumbered by serving a husband
 - And since women historically have been disproportionately burdened in marriage, we can understand the sense of Paul's words

- And Paul ends by saying he believes he has the Spirit of God directing him to state these things
 - I find that statement a wonderfully ironic reflection of how the Spirit works with prophets and teachers
 - Paul sensed he was on the right track
 - He qualified his advice and made sure to say these things weren't direct commands of Christ
 - Nevertheless, he sensed he was teaching as God preferred
 - And of course, it is in scripture, which confirms for us that Paul was, in fact, teaching according to the Lord's wishes
 - That's a fitting postscript for this entire discussion of marriage
 - We may not always know exactly what we are to do in a certain situation
 - We may not know who we are to marry or even if we are to marry
 - We may wonder about trying to hold a difficult marriage together
 - But in the end, we can trust that the Spirit of God, Who lives in each of us, will lead us into all righteousness
 - We need to turn to the Spirit and search our hearts and listen to His counsel
 - When we do this we can be sure we will find what the Lord wants for us
 - And we'll receive the strength to follow
 - To say no to the wrong potential spouse or to marriage at all
 - To say no to Christ because of temptations of comfort, wealth or family demands
 - To follow Him fully in these shortened days