



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 7:25–40

“Marriage Counsel: Part III”

1 Corinthians

TRANSCRIPT

Well, according to our clock, it's 7:30. Let's begin our class. We look to the Lord in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the way in which they have been preserved for us, and we thank Thee for the promise of the Holy Spirit to teach us. And, Lord, we ask that Thou would give us open hearts and clear minds; that as we read and ponder the things that we read, we may be guided by the Holy Spirit into the meaning of the Scriptures that Thou wished had us to have.

And, again, Lord, as we have often prayed, we pray that the things that we learn may be things that are made parts of our lives so that day by day and moment by moment by Thy grace we are enabled to keep the Word of God. We pray Thy blessing upon each one present. We pray for their families. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt bless them. And for those who may have individuals in their families who do not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we pray that Thou work in their hearts. Again, we pray for our country and for our president, for others associated with him in the government of the United States, and we pray that Thou wilt preserve this nation as a useful political entity in the world that we live in today. We give Thee thanks for this opportunity again and pray that Thou wilt be with us as we read and study thy Word.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Today I was looking at some literature that I received through the mail and then—and in that literature there was a quotation from a church in Florida which they had in their bulletin which contained this from John Calvin, and it fits with what we’ve been talking about. In chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, this is a citation from Calvin and he says, “Now we know that if anything ought to be holy in all of human life, it’s the faith that a husband has in his wife and her faith in him. In truth, all contracts and all promises that we make ought to be faithfully upheld. But if we should make a comparison, it is not without cause that marriage is called a covenant with God. By this word Solomon shows that God presides over marriages and for this reason whenever a husband breaks his promise which he has made to his wife, he has not only perjured himself with respect to her but also with respect to God. The same is true of the wife. She not only wrongs her husband, but the living God; for it is to him that she is obligated. More especially, God himself wants to maintain marriage since he has ordained it and is its author. Therefore, when we hear the word adultery, it ought to be detestable to us, as if men deliberately wanted to despise God and, like raging beasts, wanted to break the sacred bond that he has established in marriage.”

Well, I thought it was a very good statement with reference to marriage and the faithfulness of those who are within a marriage bond. Well, tonight is the third and final of our series of studies on 1 Corinthians 7 under the general title of “Marriage Counsel.” And we’re looking at chapter 7, verse 25 through verse 40. Once I think, earlier, coming to one of the chapters I made reference to the fact that it appeared that the Corinthians were troubled by Gnostic ideas. Now, Gnostic ideas were not absolutely the same in every part of the ancient world and so, consequently, it’s difficult to say, “This is Gnostic philosophy.” But one of the things that the Gnostics generally held was that matter was evil and, consequently, in order to get back to the Holy God one must come to him through a series of eons or intermediate beings. And occasionally the Gnostics, when they were in contact with Christians, would acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the highest of the angelic-type mediators but that he was not God himself.

Of course, if marriage is evil, then there's two or three things that we may—two or three ways we may respond to it. First of all, we may say that there is no possible way for us to avoid contact with matter and so we may just live as we please. And so out of that arose a philosophy of libertinism, the ability to do pretty much what you wanted to do. And then others who really sought to find a way by which they would have not contact with material things or with matter, they tended to go to asceticism and avoid certain things that at least could be partially protecting them from contact with evil.

Evidently the Corinthians were exposed to some type of philosophy or philosophies that had that as their basis, because the apostle appears to write with reference to the idea. For example, he has been talking about the Gnostic ideas of libertinism in chapter 5 through chapter 6 in verse 20 when he talked about the sexual immorality that existed in the church there that would have seemed to—at least it seemed to be to a number of commentators—to be a reflection of some contact with Gnostic thought. And then also in chapter 7, in which we have indications of some ascetic types of teaching and feeling, commentators have often thought that this reflects the other side of Gnostic-type teaching.

So we probably have those things in the background, but they're not specifically stated and so we have to leave it pretty much as supposition. Paul's basic marriage principle is summarized—I think I mentioned this last time—in two words: the *well* and the *better*. In other words, the person who marries does well but the person who does not marry does better. It's expressed in verse 38 and other places, too. But in verse 38 of this chapter, he says:

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

So, the basic principle is: if one can avoid marriage, it allows him opportunities that married people do not have, and that is the finest kind of life in the apostle’s mind. He doesn’t say that the other is bad, it’s good, but there is a way that is better.

Now, he has discussed the principles in verse 1 through verse 7; and he has handled the problems of the married in verse 8 through verse 24; these are the last two messages that I gave, particularly with reference to believers in mixed marriage, but now he turns to the unmarried in verse 25 through verse 40. And this, of course, is dangerous territory, to be unmarried.

I was reading *Commentary* magazine. I don’t know whether I mentioned this last week or not. I’ve been in Ohio, and I’ve preached about seven times over the weekend and my mind is still a bit confused from what I was saying—where I was saying—five times in a church and then two times to preachers on Monday, and we came home Monday night. So I’m not sure exactly where I said this. But I was reading in *Commentary* magazine—in my favorite Jewish magazine—neo-conservatives, and in it there was an article on the degradation of the *New York Times* by an author—you may remember his name—you may have seen it because he does occasionally write articles for the *New York Times*.

But in this article, one of the things that he accused the *New York Times* of is dumbing down the paper. I love that expression, “dumbing down” because that’s precisely what has happened in the Christian church. We are gradually dumbing down the ministry in the Christian church so that in the Christian church—and in the evangelical church I’m talking about—we are dumbing down the messages to such an extent that there’s no real presentation of the structure of Christian theology.

People can sit in our congregations for ten years and never really know what Christian theology is. They couldn’t tell you the doctrine of justification by faith, the doctrine of reconciliation, or half a dozen other doctrines that are very common and in fact, were bases upon which the evangelical church was founded. So what we have in other parts of the teaching of the New Testament is a very similar kind of thing: we have dumbed down things to such an extent that the truth is largely lost now.

On Saturday of last week, there was an article in the *New York Times* on unmarried couples, single sex couples, triads, and quintets. Why bother with marriage norms? It begins with a reference to the Austin, Texas, events of the past week or so which many of you have read about in our papers. It says—this is Peter Steinfelds who writes the religion column for the *New York Times* usually in the Saturday paper. “A week ago Austin, Texas, a liberal stronghold immobilized by conservative Christians, voted almost 2 to 1 to repeal a measure that had extended insurance benefits to unmarried partners of city employees. The next day, in a Mother’s Day commencement address, Hillary Clinton told the graduates of George Washington University that ‘No matter what a family unit looks like today, the family remains the essential ingredient of shaping our later lives.’” The article—it’s a lengthy article, almost from the top of the page to the bottom of the page, two columns—takes up the subject of “why have marriage norms?” and suggests that it might be that we shouldn’t have any norms at all; that there shouldn’t be any such thing as an organized kind of relationship that one could call marriage.

You’re living in very strange days and in the process, we are dumbing down almost everything of the principles by which we have been brought to this place in the history of the world. We are probably open to comments concerning marriage like Goldie Hawn. She said, “Marriage is ridiculous.” Bill Cosby said, “That married couples can live together day after day is a miracle the Vatican has overlooked.” That’s pretty cute.

But when we turn to the Bible, the Bible makes it very plain that marriage is a norm, and the norm is the scriptural norm, and that is what we’ve been talking about, the scriptural norm for marriage. The people who marry have made promises to one another, and those promises are to be kept because it’s an institution that has been authored by the Lord God in Heaven. And as Calvin said, “When we break the marriage vow, we not only break the marriage vow with our partner but we make a break with the Lord God himself. And so in that sense, marriage is extremely significant for us. We stand before a minister, at one point in our lives if we are married, and we hear him ask us questions like “Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife, to live together in the holiest state

of matrimony? Will thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health and with God’s help forsaking all others, cleave only onto her so long as you both shall live?” And we say, “I will.”

That’s a very, very significant vow. That’s the man’s side and the same kind of thing is asked of the woman. “Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband, to live together in the holiest state of matrimony? With the Lord’s help, wilt thou love him, obey him, comfort him (now obey him, we still keep that in some marriage ceremonies but that is long gone in most ceremonies; but it’s in the Bible, it’s in the Word of God, it’s in the person who authored matrimony.) Obey him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health and forsaking all others, cleave only onto him as long as you both shall live.”

You who married, have you done it? Have you kept that vow? That’s a vow not simply to your partner but a vow before the Lord God. Those are very important things.

Now, the apostle has given advice concerning certain parts of the problem, but now he’s going to talk to the Corinthians about virgins, verse 25 through verse 34. I want to read these verses then we’ll come back and say just a few words about them. Verse 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. I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress, that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 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. 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, 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*. For the form of this world is passing away.

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. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. 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 spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world, how she may please *her* husband.”

You notice again the apostle does not command with reference to this. He says, “Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment of the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in his mercy *has made* trustworthy.” Mercy is a very big thing with the apostle, and we don’t have time to do this, but we could turn to the 2 Corinthians chapter 4 in verse 1. And there he talks again about the mercy that has been shown to him. And in 1 Timothy chapter 1, he expatiates in a number of verses, again, over the fact that great mercy has been shown to him. *Grace* is a term that fits our guilt. *Mercy* is a term that fits the misery of our sinful existence. And so the apostle knew both of those, and he talks about mercy but notice how he puts it. He said, “I’m not giving a commandment. I don’t have one from the Lord. But I’m giving judgment as one whom the Lord, in his mercy, has made trustworthy.”

So evidently the apostle believes that he has the guiding teaching of the Holy Spirit in this, though he doesn’t have a command from the Lord. So let’s say that evidently he thinks that what he is saying is truth, but he cannot claim for it the kinds of things that he could claim for those things that the Lord Jesus said in his earthly ministry reported in Mark chapter 10, Matthew chapter 19. And of course, there are things that our Lord himself did not say anything about.

So here he speaks as one who thinks of himself as being a trustworthy person because God, in his marvelous mercy, has saved him and further has called him to the apostolate to teach the Gentiles, primarily, but the Jewish believers as well. The central thought of the apostle is that celibacy is desirable; it’s not demanded. Why? We are so far from the society of the early church that we have

to ask that question. Evidently Paul didn't anticipate that some of the Corinthians would immediately say, “Why are you saying this, Paul? This is so different from anything we know about.”

Well, from reading the passage here and from knowing the things that our Lord had said with which the apostle was familiar, evidently for him he thinks of marriage as a temporary covenant for the propagation of the human race. But the relation to the Lord is an eternal relation—relationship. And so in the light of that, what he seems to be suggesting to us is that we, as believers, should remember that we are heading to an eternal destiny in the presence of the Lord.

And while it may seem like we've been here for a long time, some of us have been here for a pretty long time—but when you think about the history of the human race, it's really just a dot in the history of the human race that you and I have been here as well. He wants to focus our attention upon the fact that we are on our way to eternity. And this is temporary. And we are to spend ourselves during this temporary period of time in seeking the Lord and ministering as believers for him in the society of which we are apart. I gather that that's what—that's why Paul says the things that he says when he says, “Marriage is good. It's all right to marry, but it's better to give yourself holy to the Lord.” And now he is going to talk about why it is so.

I would—I did—I guess I made the point, I don't know that I especially said it. But when Paul says that he is one who has been shown mercy by the Lord, he hints—doesn't say specifically, but he hints at the fact that he believes he is writing by divine inspiration. We, in the Christian church, perhaps in our day are not giving proper credit to those who, by the grace of God, have given themselves to a celibate or single life. The unmarried woman, for example, and the unmarried man who have given themselves to service for the Lord and have eschewed marriage; we should give them credit for what they have done.

H. A. Ironside has a, I think, a marvelous paragraph on that. I'm going to read it. He said, “The unmarried woman, if dedicated to the work of the Lord, cares for the things of the Lord that she may be holy in body and soul (that's what Paul wants them to be.) Some of the most wonderful

Christians that ever have lived have been women who for Christ’s sake chose never to marry; but to devote their lives to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I never quite understand why married people who have the comforts of home often speak in a disparaging and unkind way of unmarried people. It should be that if marriage is so delightful, that married people would speak in a very tenderness and—tender and sympathetic way of people who have not married. But instead of that, they speak sometimes in such a contentious way. I never like to hear people say, “Oh she’s just an old maid” or “he is just an old bachelor.” Wait a minute! He whom you so designate may be glorifying the Lord in a way he could not have done if he were the head of a household and she of whom you speak, may be one who is rendering wonderful service to God and humanity. I repeat, some of most devoted Christians I have ever know have been unmarried men and women who gave themselves wholly to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. All honor to them. I agree with that.

Many of the missionaries who have gone out from the shores of the United States have been women missionaries who’ve gone out, spent their lives in heathen lands and the jungles, and in the countries where things are not nearly so nice as the United States of America, and have been responsible for many, many people having an opportunity to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I’ve known of some who have gone to Mexico, translated the language of tribes themselves and then written the Bible for them, so to speak, translated it, and made it possible for people to have the Bible in their own language. What a marvelous ministry. And when you remember that we are here just a short time and eternity is fairly long, you can see what a marvelous choice has been made by some people to not be entangled in marriage.

Now, Paul justifies what he is saying in a few statements in verse 26 through verse 35. I want to look at them. There are three simple reasons that he suggests why we ought, if possible, to prefer to be single rather than to be married if the Lord should so seem to lead us that way. First of all, in verse 26 through verse 28:

“I suppose therefore that this is good (that is, to be single) because of the present distress—*it is* good for a man to remain as he is.”

What does he mean by the present distress? Well, probably in the light of his own situation, he knew lots of persecution, and he knew persecution in Corinth remember. There he was persecuted and like so many of the apostles, hammered from pillar to post in carrying out the ministry of the gospel in the synagogues, and then out of the synagogues as well. But probably also he has in mind the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of the future and spoke also of the trials that awaited those that would be on the earth in the future in the midst of the tribulations that lie in the future. For example, in Luke chapter 21 in verse 23 our Lord in the Olivet Discourse says, “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon the people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

So the idea of the future being a time in which there would be great persecution on the earth and actually, specially, persecutions for women who were pregnant with their children. You can understand the apostle writing here concerning virgins, telling them that it’s a good thing for a man or for a woman to remain in their single estate. If you were looking at the TV screen when the pictures began to flash on the screen about the tornado in Lancaster, you can get some idea of what it must be if this is general and not simply located in one place. And think of a person who has a family; what he has responsibility for is not simply himself, what he has responsibility for is his wife and children. And the responsibilities of earthquakes and all of the other things that are set forth as judgments in the future, must also have been upon the apostles mind because we look back and say, “Now that didn’t happen.” Well, it didn’t happen then and that’s true. Paul didn’t have our ability to look back and say, “It’s not going to happen. I know Lewis is going to be on the earth 1900 years from now and so not to worry about it.” But we don’t know when these things are going to happen.

It may be next week that some of these things begin to work up to what the Scriptures tell us about. We know they’re coming to pass. Our Lord who is—it’s impossible for him to lie—has set forth these things.

So the present distress, the increasing trials that herald the end of the age. This is one reason Paul cites why it’s better to stay single. But, furthermore, he says in verse 29 through 31:

“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.”

I don’t know how you would do that. That would be a very difficult command to fulfill. How can I possibly be as if Martha was not my wife and still the marriage preserved? I’d like to be able to ask Paul “How?” on that. But that’s what he says.

Now, you might also say, “Why does the apostle say to us in verse 29 that now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none? Did he not just say just above; did he not reject the celibate life and say, ‘Yes, you can go ahead and marry?’ How is it possible for someone to say something like this and harmonize it with the other?” I think again—I thought—I think that what he is saying to us is that he is seeking to prepare us for heaven by recognizing that the present life is: temporary. That’s the thing that he wants to get over. It’s temporary. We are here just for a period of time; a short period of time and so, therefore, these things make much more sense. He says, Those who use the world—verse 31:

“And those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form (this word is the word that really means fashion; for the fashion, the outward form) of this world is passing away;” the fashion.

Roseanne is going to be gone; the Cowboys will be gone; lots of laughs will be gone; the theater; recreation; carousals. Augustine said that the reason he turned from premillennialism to

amillennialism is because premillennialism talks so much about the Gormandizing that they expected to experience in the kingdom of God upon the earth, and he realized that that idea of a kingdom couldn't be in harmony with God, and so he moved from believing in a kingdom of God on the earth with all of the pleasures of the kingdom of God on the earth as he was thinking about it. But they so overdid it, he decided that he would become an amillennialists and therefore not believe in a kingdom of God upon the earth.

I think, a lot of people it seems to me, think that the kingdom of God is now because everything that we do is done with the idea of pleasure rather than the idea of serving the Lord. Many of us are guilty of that. I do not excuse myself. I preach to you, but I preach to myself at my desk ahead of time as well. All of the time that we spend on recreation and the things that please us in a physical way; these are things I think that Paul is specifically speaking against. We are here for a limited time. We are representatives of the Lord God, and we are to give ourselves to the service of Him. The fashion of this world passes away.

Paul's careful to explain in what he has to say with regard to the single life that under certain circumstances, it's preferable, possibly wiser, than entering into the marriage relation, but he doesn't mean to put people under a legal restriction. It's evident that it was necessary for him to explain this because within a century and a half the monastic orders arose where people misunderstood Paul and decided that what Paul was talking about was that we should not marry, we should gather together in monastic orders in monasteries and nunneries, and there we should give our lives to the service of the Lord, which all so often was not the service of Lord at all, but simply a retirement from the society about them.

You can see how that arose out of a false understanding about what Paul is talking about. It's better not to marry; it's better to stay single. And so we have the priests and the nuns, and this was not simply in the Roman Catholic Church, but in other [ways] also this took place of gathering orphans, staying by themselves and not going out to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I

can easily see how that may have arisen from the things that Paul talks about. It was just a short time after the apostle gave this instruction to the Corinthians that that began to happen.

Dr. Ironside also has a section in his commentary in which he mentions a dear friend of his, spent a great deal of his time traveling around the world giving out the gospel. And his wife remained at home, perhaps two-thirds of the year, caring for the little family that they had.

He said, “He said once to her, ‘It must get awfully lonely for you. You hardly have a married life at all, living like you do with your husband away two-thirds of the time.’”

He said her eyes filled with tears and she said, “The day my husband and I were married, we promised each other that we would never let our personal comfort interfere with our devotion to the work of the Lord. And I believe he called my husband for this great evangelistic ministry and therefore, I’m glad to keep the house while he goes out to his work.”

And Dr. Ironside said, “I said to her I have a choice tidbit for you. Have you noticed what David said concerning those that abide by the stuff while the other warriors go out to war against the Philistines and the others? And he said (David), ‘As his part is that goeth down to the battle so shall his part be that tarryeth by the stuff.’ In other words, in the battle the warriors will divide half of the spoils, not all of the spoils, and those that stayed by the supplies will serve just as those who fought the battle. And so he went on to tell the wife, that when the time came for judgment and the rewards were passed out, she would have half of her husband’s by staying home and staying by the stuff to use the biblical language.

One other thing Paul says here, the third thing. These reasons because of the present distress because the time is short, then he says, I want you to be without care; verse 32 through verse 35:

“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. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin.” (Now I’m reading a translation here that may be different from yours because this text maybe translated in different ways

and has been done that way because New Testament students differ a bit over the finest interpretation of the words Paul wrote.) “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.”

I want you to be without care. Well, that’s very difficult, Paul, for us to be without care. Our Lord also spoke some marvelous words in connection with that back in Matthew chapter 6 in the Sermon on the Mount. He said beginning at verse 25 of Matthew chapter 6:

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

We’ve just come from looking at a TV thing while we were eating supper which was focused on some birds. And this kind of strikes home when you look at the birds and see what they’re doing and you say, “Our Lord said I’m worth more than a woodpecker. I’m happy to know that.”

“Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith (in Believers Chapel)?” Will he not? “Therefore (verse 34) do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble. All

of these things the Gentiles seek after. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all of these things will be added to you.”

Would it be nice if all of us in this auditorium gave ourselves wholeheartedly to seeking the kingdom of God first in the confidence and known the fulfillment, that all of these things would be added to us? Paul, when you say here that you want us to be without care, that’s what I want to be, too. I want to be without care.

“This I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you but for what is proper that you may serve the Lord without distraction.” Well, in one sense, I am without care; when he says that he wants us to be without care, there’s one sense in which I am. And of course it’s a very important sense. I am without care so far as my justification is concerned. I do not have to worry about being justified for the Bible says, “Therefore being justified by faith, let us go on having peace with God. Through what happened when Christ died on Calvary’s cross, taking the penalty for my sin and by finishing the work, made it possible for God to give me a righteousness—the righteousness of God—that fully satisfies his requirements. I have no care with respect to entrance into heaven itself. I do not feel that I have to worry about whether I’m going to be accepted or not because I stand in Christ’s gift of righteousness, the righteousness of God to those who by faith have been brought to rest upon him and what he has done.

The Apostle Paul in the same chapters in which he talks about justification by faith, talks in critical terms of Judaizing Christianity in which great stress is laid upon what we must do in and which leads Christians into bondage and fear of the judgment that is to come. Men often engage in good works and religious practices because they’re not confident of God’s grace. But now that he has proven his love beyond doubt, in that—while he has proved his love beyond doubt in that we were still sinners, at that time Christ died for us such—what one commentator has called “anxious religiosity”—is out of place for the Christian. We are to be without care, and by God’s grace we have a measure of that. May we have a great deal more.

Asceticism, of course, led to people seeking to do things to keep from having contact with evil because they thought that by doing that they would, therefore, be more acceptable to the Lord God. I like that last expression that he makes there in verse 35, “And this I say for your own profit. Not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper that you may serve the Lord without distraction.”

Now, that brings a picture before my mind; serving the Lord without distraction. My mind goes back to the incident in which our Lord went into the house at Bethany. And immediately we entered the house, Martha went into the kitchen to prepare something that would be suitable for him. But Mary sat down at his feet and began to listen to his Word. In fact, back in Luke chapter 10, the word that is used to describe Martha’s reaction is a word that is related to this word; the same root. In Luke chapter 10 in verse 40, this word is stated when we read, “But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’ And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’”

Martha was distracted with much serving. But Paul says he wants us to be—“This I say for your own profit not that I may put a leash on you but for what is proper so you may serve the Lord without distraction;” the ideal, to serving like Mary rather than like Martha.

Now, of course later on after this incident, Martha is praised for doing some of her service, too. But it’s a little picture of what is more important in the Lord’s eyes: the ministry to him, the listening to him, and hearing his Word; than the business with which so many of us get involved in Christian things and in other things. There ought to be a Mary side to all of us as well as a Martha side; and the Mary side—I’m afraid the Christian Church—evangelicals I’m talking about—have neglected it very much. If you just go back and put down on a piece of paper how much you have—how much time you have spent reading the Scriptures; that’s listening to his Word—how much time have you spent reading the Scriptures—and you’ll have an understanding of how well you are

fulfilling the statements that the apostle and our Lord make about serving the Lord without being drawn away by the cares of this life and the cares of this world that do not fit. The very verb that is used—Martha was distracted. Martha was drawn away—{*perispato*}—the word that is used here, the root that is used here that we may serve the Lord without distraction; that is, without Martha-distracted.

Now, the final—not the final—I should say the next problem—these are two brief ones, as well as I have brief time—the problem of the engaged couple, verse 36 through verse 38:

“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.”

Now this is a statement that is ambiguous in several parts. Who is the unexpressed subject? The father of the virgin daughter who had authority with reference to the marriage of her daughter—is that what Paul means when he says here in verse 36, “But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin”? That is, his virgin daughter? Fathers had authority to give their daughters to whomever they wished in marriage. That’s a possible reference.

On the other hand, it may be something else. It may be an engaged couple and is more likely to be this. So that when he writes, “But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin,” this is a couple that are engaged one to another. And most of the more recent—I think probably more of the more recent commentators have taken this viewpoint—an engaged couple and the renunciation of the marriage would be unfair to the woman and impossible to the man because of the sexual strain of living in that relationship for a lengthy period of time.

“If any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth.” That expression “past the flower of youth”—{*uperakmos*}—is an adjective that means not simply—could mean not simply “past the flower of youth” but also can mean oversexed; in which case it would refer to the man. In the other case, it would refer to the woman. You can see that

students of 1 Corinthians, New Testament professors, are not absolutely certain about what Paul means by this, but if this is a reference to an engaged couple who are living in a marriage in which there is no sexual relationship, it might reach the place where the strain is either too much for the man or too much for the woman or it's unfair to the woman, and so the apostle says let him do what he wishes or he does not sin, let them marry in that particular instance.

So the problem of this engaged couple is expressed by the apostle in this way. Some people—some apparently who sought to live in a single relationship but found it too difficult to do it; that's right down to the strains and stresses of human life.

Now finally, the last two verses have to do with the problem of widowers. I'll read verse 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. (If the man is not troubled by the strain of the marriage; then, that's fine.) So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well. (That word may also mean marries her; there is some questions about each of the points here.) But he who does not give *her* in marriage (or doesn't marry) does better.”

The problem is some of the words have two meanings and if they—if this means to give in marriage, the suggestion is it reference is to a father. If it means to marry, can mean that, then it would be the reference that I mentioned to you.

But now in verse 39 and verse 40:

“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.”

This incidentally was a common law among the Gentiles and I think among the Jews as well, although I didn't note that in my notes, and I have forgotten whether the sources discuss the point.

At least it was a common law before it was Christian teaching that a wife is bound by law as long as a husband lives. If her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. The Apostle Paul, remember, in Romans chapter 7 says much the same thing. I think we’ve got time to read those verses; they fit right in with this. And he says here with relationship to the Law of Moses illustrating our relationship to the Law of Moses. He says:

“Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband.”

So the apostle uses something of the same thing in making his point that we are not under the Law of Moses as a code.

Now, just a couple of things before we conclude; in verse 39 and verse 40, he says, “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies.” Now, he’s talking about a Christian. The term that is used “death” is the term that means to sleep. This is a term that is reserved for Christian death. So far as I know, never in the New Testament, is the term {*koimao*} used of an unbeliever’s death. It’s always a Christian’s death. The Christians fall asleep. Why do they fall asleep? Why don’t they die? Well, they do die. But I mean, why does he describe them as falling asleep? Because when you fall asleep, you’re still living. And when you fall asleep, you’re resting. And when you fall asleep, you’re going to awaken.

Now, all of that is true to what happens to us when the spirit leaves the body and goes to be with the Lord and the body is placed in the grave. We have fallen asleep. That’s what will happen with me. I will fall asleep, and my body will be placed in the grave. My spirit will be with the Lord. I’ll still be living. The Arminians will be unhappy about that, but I’ll still be living. And, furthermore, I’ll be resting, and you folks will be working hard down here. And I will look forward to the resurrection, and I’ll join you at that place again.

Now, he says that it’s all right to be married again if the husband dies, but only in the Lord. Now, this is generally taken to mean, only marry a Christian, but it really doesn’t say that. It says that you should remarry within the Lord’s will and so secondarily to marry within the Lord’s will in the light of other statements is to marry a believing person because Scripture speaks very strongly about not marrying an unbeliever. So “only in the Lord” doesn’t specifically say marry a Christian, it says marry as befitting a Christian who is in the Lord.

That’s clear from verse 22 where he says, “For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord’s freedman.” So “in the Lord” means to—if you’re going to marry—if the person whose husband dies is going to marry, then marry like a Christian would marry; that is, in harmony with the faith you profess. Don’t marry an unbeliever.

And Paul—you know, Paul is very human. I love the way he finishes this chapter. He says, “But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment (again, no command)—according to my judgment, and I think I have the Spirit of God.” No, he didn’t say that. There’s another little word. He said, “I think I *also* have the Spirit of the Lord.”

Now, what does that indicate? Well, that other people evidently were claiming to have the Spirit of the Lord, and the apostle was having to deal with the situation in Corinth. He had enemies there, and he’s trying to settle things. And he says ironically these people have been claiming that they have the Spirit of the Lord. I think I also have the Spirit of the Lord. They say I haven’t, but I think I have. It’s all right there. I think I also have the Spirit of the Lord. He’s talking about others who have said that evidently; otherwise there’s no reason for an “also.”

So the well and the better express the apostle’s mind. The existence of the race is not compromised if the apostle should say, “It’s better to be single” because remember, he said back in verse 7, “I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in another.” The apostle knew that the matter of staying single was a matter of divine gift of celibacy and history has experienced—well, his experience indicated to him that few, relatively speaking, had the gift. It’s still the best, but the propagation of the race will go on, and

history indicates that, as well as the divine intention set out in the book of Genesis: be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth; God standing behind his Word to accomplish his purpose.

Well, it's just about time for us to stop. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. We thank Thee for the apostle. We marvel so often, Lord, at the faithfulness of this great servant of God. O, give us something of the wholehearted dedication to the will of God. Those of us who are married, that we might put the Lord first in our lives; and those of us who are not married, that we and they may together give ourselves to waiting upon the Lord without distraction.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.