

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

IX. God's Advice To Unmarried Believers

(1 Corinthians 7:25-40)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul discipled in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. Having discussed marriage, celibacy and divorce, Paul gave advice to unmarried believers in 1 Corinthians 7:25-40. We view this passage for our insight, application, and edification:

II. God's Advice To Unmarried Believers, 1 Corinthians 7:25-40.

- A. In 1 Corinthians 7:25-35, Paul did not give any direct command from the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:25), but he supplied his suggestion in apostolic authority that celibacy was to be preferred, though not required:
- B. Paul gave three reasons for making this suggestion (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 519), 1 Corinthians 7:26-35:
 - 1. First, celibacy was preferred but not required due to a looming distress for Paul's readers, vv. 26-28:
 - a. The "present distress" in v. 26 KJV "may have referred to persecution then being suffered by the Corinthians . . . or to an experience of suffering which Paul anticipated would . . . befall them," *Ibid.*
 - b. Either way, distress is more easily handled if one is unmarried than if he has a spouse and children, leading Paul to recommend that the unmarried believers at Corinth remain unmarried, *Ibid.*, vv. 26-27.
 - c. Paul was careful to add that proceeding to get married even in the face of such looming distress was not sinful, but that he had made his recommendation to remain single to spare his readers added pain, v. 28.
 - 2. Second, celibacy was preferred but not required due to the imminent return of Christ, vv. 29-31: In view of Christ's imminent return, Paul noted that a believer's "detachment from temporal matters" of this life "should characterize all Christians," but that this "was more complex for the married . . . for whom, nonetheless, devotion to their Lord should occupy first place in life (Luke 14:26)," *Ibid.*
 - 3. Third, celibacy was preferred but not required because it gave opportunity for focused ministry, vv. 32-35:
 - a. Paul added that celibacy gave opportunity for one's undivided attention to God, v. 32-34.
 - b. However, Paul was careful to note that he was merely recommending celibacy, not ordering it, v. 35.
- C. At 1 Corinthians 7:36-38, a debate has long occurred over whether Paul wrote of a prospective bridegroom or of the father of a prospective bride, *Ibid.*, p. 520. If Paul wrote of a bridegroom, the bridegroom was delaying marriage so that his bride was getting on in age, what could adversely affect her chance of ever getting married even if she did not have the gift of celibacy, *Ibid.* However, if Paul wrote of a father, the father was refusing to give his daughter in marriage to keep her more devoted to Christ even if she did not have the gift of celibacy. The solution is found in defining the meaning of the Greek verbs for "marry" in vv. 36 and 38 KJV:
 - 1. In verse 36, the verb used once for "marry" is *gameitosan* from *gameo* that *usually* means "marry," U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 594; The Analy. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 75; *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T.
 - 2. In verse 38, the verb for "marry" that is twice used there is *gamizon* from *gamizo* that *usually* means "to give in marriage," U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; *Ibid.*, The Analy. Grk. Lex.; *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T.
 - 3. Matthew 24:38 and Mark 12:25 are the only other New Testament passages where *gameo* and *gamizo* appear, and there their meanings are clearly different from one another as in second century usage, *Ibid.*
 - 4. Thus, in v. 36, Paul wrote about a father of a prospective bride, directing that he not feel obligated to hold to his initial pledge not to give his daughter in marriage, but to let the couple involved go ahead and "marry." In verse 38, Paul summed up his advice, referring to a father's "giving in marriage" his daughter.
 - 5. Paul advised that the father who gave his daughter in marriage did well, but if he did not, he did better.
- D. In 1 Corinthians 7:39-40, Paul added that though marriage was binding, the death of a spouse freed the living spouse to remarry, but only another believer. Yet, Paul still suggested celibacy for widows and widowers.

Lesson: *Paul suggested that unmarried believers remain single, but he did not make this suggestion mandatory due to the issue of the presence or the absence of the gift of celibacy as stipulated back in 1 Corinthians 7:7.*

Application: *May the unwed consider the recommendations of and heed the command of 1 Corinthians 7:25-40.*