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A1222 – May 27, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 7:29-35
Living As Eschatological People

I had been looking for some story to share about some of our servicemen. And I mentioned to Lee Neel I was looking for a book that had accounts, short summaries of various soldiers. Over the next couple of weeks he sent me a short speech by Ronald Reagan and this story that I'll now share with you on this Memorial Day. This was part of a speech by Lt General John Kelly of the USMC, given Nov 13, 2010, just four days after his own son was killed by an IED on his third combat tour. However, the speech was not about his own son, it was about the last six seconds of two young marines' lives who had served under him in Ramadi, Iraq, one of the most intense combat regions due to the intense activity of Al Qaeda. On the 22nd of April, 2008, Corporal Jonathan Yale (22) and Lance Corporal Jordan Haerter (20) were stationed to prevent any unauthorized vehicles or personnel into the area of the Marine barracks. What happened shortly thereafter was witnessed by several Iraqi Police and later discovered to have survived on a surveillance camera.

Here's how Lt General Kelly described it: "You can watch the last six seconds of their young lives. Putting myself in their heads, I supposed it took about a second for the two Marines to separately come to the same conclusion about what was going on once the truck came into their view at the far end of the alley. Exactly no time to talk it over, or call the sergeant to ask what they should do. Only enough time to take half an instant and think about what the sergeant told them to do only a few minutes before: 'Let no unauthorized personnel or vehicles pass.' The two Marines had about five seconds left to live. "It took maybe another two seconds for them to present their weapons, take aim, and open up. By this time, the truck was halfway through the barriers and gaining speed the whole time. Here, the recording shows a number of Iraqi police, some of whom had fired their AKs, now scattering like the normal and rational men they were -- some running right past the

Marines. They had three seconds left to live. For about two seconds more, the recording shows the Marines' weapons firing non-stop -- the truck's windshield exploding into shards of glass as their rounds take it apart and tore in to the body of the SOB who is trying to get past them to kill their brothers, American and Iraqi, bedded down in the barracks, totally unaware of the fact that their lives at that moment depended entirely on two Marines standing their ground...The recording shows the truck careening to a stop immediately in front of the two Marines. In all of the instantaneous violence, Yale and Haerter never hesitated. By all reports and by the recording, they never stepped back. They never even started to step aside. They never even shifted their weight. With their feet spread shoulder width apart, they leaned into the danger, firing as fast as they could work their weapons. They had only one second left to live. The truck explodes. The camera goes blank. Two young men go to their God. Six seconds. Not enough time to think about their families, their country, their flag or about their lives or their deaths, but more than enough time for two very brave young men to do their duty, into eternity. That is the kind of people who are on watch all over the world tonight for you.”ⁱ And those are the kind of people we want to remember today. If you see a soldier today; active, reserve or veteran, don't forget to thank them (and their families) for their service and sacrifice to uphold the Constitution by protecting and preserving our freedoms, putting themselves in harm's way so we can enjoy our way of life comfortably.

If you'd turn in your Bible to 1 Cor 7. We come to 1 Cor 7:32-35 and in this passage Paul deals with concerns at Corinth that are not the overwhelming concerns among Christians in the West today, namely, should I remain single in the interest of being more spiritual. Although they were misguided at least they had a high concern for spirituality. In our day it's much worse, Christians in the West want to do as they want and then find a Bible verse to support it. I don't know about you but as I go through 1 Corinthians, a very bad church I've concluded and I haven't said anything till now but I've been having this thought since 1 Cor 5, and that is that the Church in America is worse than Corinth. At least they had a strong desire to be more spiritual and were willing to change their lives radically to do so. In our day we want to do what we want to do and redefine spirituality to equal whatever I do. So if you think what Paul wrote to the Corinthians was damning, you better think again, the letter he would send us would be far worse.

Think about this because it's very important to realize how bad the Church in America really is. Just take this one question, "Why do most people choose to attend a church?" I'm a pastor, I have people come and go and I have to deal with all of that and many times it's very painful. But here's the bottom line, people choose a church 99 times out of a 100 because that church endorses their behavior and makes them feel better about themselves. I've seen it over and over. Well, I like the music, I like the entertainment, I like they accept alternative lifestyles and don't condemn anything, I like the rationalism, I it's always I like something they do because that's up my alley. Well, by golly, I'm sorry we're not going to accommodate you. And the basic reason is because of another question I'm going to ask you, "Just what is the purpose of the local church? What is the local church supposed to do? If we look at the pages of the NT, what are we supposed to do?" Mature the saints by teaching the word of God. So if your local church isn't doing that you should leave, I'm telling you to get out because that place is apostate. There may be lots of nice people there, that doesn't matter, church is not about relationships. Church is about God and Jesus Christ. So if you're staying for relationships you are staying for the wrong reason. If your Church doesn't teach verse by verse through books of the Bible, leave! If your Church has 45 minutes of rock band praise songs and 15 minutes of teaching, walk out the door. The only reason to stay in a Church is because of the teaching of the word of God. So look around at the Church in America, is there really a lot of strong Bible teaching?

There is no desire to be spiritual; there is a desire to redefine spirituality as what I like, which is ludicrous. That's why if you stay around here you've got to be serious about true spirituality because we don't do that around here. We teach the Bible and when it says that's sin we say, that's sin; when it says that's righteousness, we say that's righteousness. We say it firmly but nicely, we are to speak the truth in love, but hey, the truth is the truth and sometimes, especially in our culture where we've had so much sensitivity training that we've turned out a bunch of sissies so when you go to tell someone the truth they just melt, why, my little feelings are hurt. Well you need to toughen up. Jesus Christ was no sissy. Jesus Christ turned over 900 pound tables in His Father's house and said get out of here.

And I'm not training you to be sissies where I have to tiptoe around when I teach the Bible. You have to toughen up if you want to hear this book, because it's raw and in your face and it keeps hitting you in the face because

you are a sinner. And it doesn't feel good. But the raw truth of the matter is that the Church in America today is worse than Corinth. I say that with no hesitancy. At least they strived for spirituality, I don't see that in American Churches, I see striving for prosperity, for music, for entertainment, for tolerance, but not spirituality.

Now if you want to be spiritual, in the biblical sense, which is thinking God's thoughts after Him and living that way, then you have to stay in this book and respond to God with humility. Now the basic lesson of this section is why are you so concerned about this world system when it's passing away? The section begins in verse 25 with virgins, we've already seen those who have been or are married, now we're looking at those who have never been married and never engaged in intimate relations. And I find it interesting that the Corinthians had so much concern over these people. Apparently one of the big concerns was this offshoot group of Corinthians who were legalists. They claimed that you could enjoy a heightened spirituality if you denied the body's natural urge to intimacy. So they were telling the virgins who were probably engaged to be married, don't do it, you're going to spoil your spirituality. So the bottom line is this group was a problem. However, the difficulty Paul has is communicating that there are good reasons for remaining single nonetheless, but they're just not the reasons of the legalists. So there are nuances to the issue and that's what makes it difficult to follow.

In a way they are both the legalists and are arguing for singleness but the way they get there is different. For example, the legalists argued you should remain single on the basis of spirituality, you'll be more spiritual. Paul would deny that. However Paul would argue that you should remain single in certain situations simply because it will make life easier and there's no reason to take on undue suffering. So yeah, singleness is valid, but there are good and bad reasons for remaining single. And if you're following it for a bad reason then that's no good, doing a good thing for a bad reason doesn't make it right. You want to have good reasons.

Looking again at verse 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. 27Are you married? Remain married. Are you single? Remain single." That's all verse 27 means. That hard reading in the NASB is just unnecessarily misleading. The end of verse 26 controls, remain as you are. Are you married? Remain

married. Are you single? Remain single. But the reason he has given this advice is purely situational. This is not for all time. It relates to a particular distressing situation at Corinth. We don't know for sure what it was but it was something that would make life more difficult if you got married. So the advice to stay single here had nothing to do with the legalists advice to stay single, it was purely situational, nevertheless, it's not required. Paul isn't legalistic about it, this is just his opinion. Verse 28, "But if you marry, you have not sinned;" so you can still marry he says, "and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." That's directly aimed against the legalists, he's saying, if you want to marry, go ahead, marry, don't listen to the legalists, you're not sinning by getting married and you're not going to be unspiritual. Phooey. "Yet," he says, "such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you." So whatever the distress was, it would have made it more distressing if they got married. Therefore why not put it off for awhile, wait for the distress to pass, then get married.

Then we came to verse 29 and here we deal with something that remains true for all time. Namely, "brethren, the time has been shortened," which is a perfect passive participle, meaning the time had been cut short at some point in the past and it remains short up to the present time. The fact is it remains short up to our time. This is something unique about the present era starting on the Day of Pentecost, and that is, we have no idea when the present age will end, by which we mean the Church age. Jesus Christ can get up off the Father's throne and come for His Church at any time. And that is supposed to impress upon us a sense of urgency. The problem as I cited last week is that it's been a long time since the time has been shortened and consequently we've lost this sense of urgency. We don't live as eschatological people, we don't live as if Christ can come today; we live as if Christ is probably not coming today. Take a look at this quote again by Kurt Aland. "Up until the middle of the second century, and even later, Christians did not live in and for the present, but they lived in and for the future; and this was in such a way that the future flowed into the present, that future and present became one—a future which obviously stood under the Lord's presence. It was the confident expectation of the first generations that the end of the world was not only near, but that it had really already come. It was the definite conviction not only of Paul, but of all Christians of that time, that they themselves would experience the return of the Lord." How and when did this conviction get lost? "As soon as the thought of a postponement of the Parousia

was uttered once...it developed its own life and power. At first, people looked at it as only a brief postponement, as the Shepherd of Hermas clearly expresses. But soon, as the end of the world did not occur, it was conceived of as a longer and longer period, until finally—this is today's situation, nothing but the thought of a postponement exists in people's consciousness. Hardly any longer is there the thought of the possibility of an imminent Parousia. Today we live with the presumption—I would almost say *from* the presumption—that this world is going to continue; it dominates our consciousness. Practically, we no longer speak about a postponement, but only seldom does the idea of the end of the world and the Lord's return for judgment even occur to us; rather, it is pushed aside as annoying and disturbing—“ And so somehow we've got to recapture the sense of urgency evident in the lives of the 1st century Christians.

Now to do that I suggested that we pay close attention to current events because we do see a lot of stage setting being done in preparation for end-times prophecy to be fulfilled. There are current events related to the nations; namely, the alliance between Russia and Iran that could be setting the stage for the Battle of Gog and Magog in Ezek 38-39. There are current events related to monetary policy which could lead to a global currency. There are current technologies related to the implantation of small devices under the skin for identification purposes. There are religious movements to break down barriers and move to a one world religion. As far as Israel is concerned, they are now recognized as a State of Israel since 1948, they have controlled Jerusalem since the six-day war of 1967, the orthodox have started the third Temple movement, preparing vestments and furniture, training 1,000's of Levitical priests and are prepared to re-build the Temple when the Dome of the Rock is removed. These are just a few of the current events setting the stage for end-times prophecy to be fulfilled. And these should cause us to recapture the sense of urgency that has been lost during the last 1,850 years of Church History. And that urgency is to produce effects in our lives like the apostle Paul's; i.e. godly living, evangelism, intense evangelism and training, sound biblical training so we are fortified in our faith and ready to go to combat with unbelief.

Today we want to look at vv 32-35 which grow out of this sense of urgency. Otherwise we run the risk of missing the context. If you miss the context what you do in vv 32-35 is conclude that the central feature is remaining

single over against getting married. But if you stay in the context you conclude that the central feature is making decisions about marriage in light of the fact that the time has been shortened and the form of this world passing away. In other words, there is an interim Christian ethic, unique to our age which should be considered when getting married. Of course, Paul recognized that celibacy is a gift, and you may or may not have the gift, and Paul did prefer celibacy, but we wouldn't want to conclude from that that marriage is sinful. That was what the ascetics at Corinth argued. Paul argued that marriage was not sinful but that in light of Christ's coming and the form of this world passing away, he preferred the single life.

Verse 32, **But I want you to be free from concern.** Now by concern he could mean it positively, as genuine concern over proper things, or he could mean it negatively, as anxiety. It seems that his meaning here is anxiety because of verse 31, "the form of this world is passing away." And he wants us to be free from anxiety over the things of this world. See, what's going on is we have to live in the world system, we have to make use of it, to some degree, and it's a system opposed to God. You say I don't partake of the world system! Oh really? Do you have a bank account? Well you're taking part in the system; you're making use of it. Take for example your paycheck - you get a paycheck every two weeks and you deposit it in the bank or have direct deposit. The bottom line is your money goes in there and what does the bank do? They take 90% of what you deposit, multiply it by 10 and loan it out, creating fiat currency. They are creating money and the money supply is always inflating and when someone pays back their loan it deflates, but the inflation far outways the deflation and you already knew that. We all live in the fractional reserve system. Now is that God's economic system? No, God's economic system is the full reserve system. But we don't live in that system. So you see we're forced to be a part of the world system in the area of economics. I'm just trying to illustrate the problem. Paul knew the problem, he knew he had to live and make use of a godless system. And it's a frustration. We don't live in the kingdom yet. But Paul's point in these verses is that if you remain single, you can be less dependent on the world system, you don't have so many anxieties caused by being in the system, as a single you can have less anxiety with respect to the world. When you get married you tend to be more involved in the system and there's nothing you can do about it, life is more complicated.

Now he's not saying marriage is wrong, nothing is wrong with marriage, he's just saying if you stay single you're not being pulled in so many directions at the same time. You can pretty much do what you want to do. Thinking as a Christian you can devote all of your energies toward the Lord. That's what he's saying there of the single man in verse 32, **One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord.** He can throw himself entirely into that. He doesn't have any other obligations. And this is what Paul would like. Paul would just love it if every Christian could be as he was. Paul had a lot of freedom and Paul could move all over the Mediterranean world preaching the gospel, training believers and founding local churches. He could do this all day and he didn't have a wife to worry about, he didn't have kids to take care of, he could just focus all his energies on the gospel and training believers.

Verse 33, **But the one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided.** Or better, he's pulled in two directions, his desire to please the Lord and throw himself entirely into that over against his desire to please his wife. It's not that desiring to please your wife is wrong, it's just that it takes time and energy, that's all. Pleasing your wife is good, don't get me wrong, it's just that you have less assets to devote to pleasing the Lord because of your marital responsibilities. And you take on a whole lot more interest in the world because now there are two of you living in this world system and one has desires this way, another that way, and it's constant struggle with the world system; you have to come together on things and that's easier said than done, it just gets complicated. Nothing wrong with it, nothing sinful about it, just understand that yes, as far as your interests are concerned, they are divided, you can't just rush off on a mission trip, you can't stay all night at the office studying, you have your wife's needs to attend to. And the time is short, you would like to be able to give more interests to the things of the Lord, but you are limited.

Verse 34 and he turns to the woman, saying essentially the same thing, **The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin,** so he's split the single women into two categories, **unmarried** meaning widows and **virgins**, self-explanatory, each of these women **is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit;** meaning her entire person; don't read into this the establishment of a nunnery and you're going

to go be a nun. The point is that she can be totally dedicated to the Lord if she remains single. The word translated **holy** means dedicated; dedicated to the things of the Lord. **But one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband.** Just like the husband's attention is divided so her interest is divided between the Lord and her husband. You just can't accomplish all the things you could accomplish for the Lord if you are married. Again, it's not saying marriage is wrong, but singleness does have its advantages. Probably everyone that's married has said, "If I were single I could..." but you can't because you're married. And now you have something to talk about over lunch with your spouse. And I hope that goes well for you. I've never thought that, but I hear that most people have.

Anyway, verse 35, **This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you** and this is actually a metaphor, a figure of speech, **not to put a restraint upon you** literally says "not to put a snare on you." If you have a big ranch you try to catch coyotes or mountain lions with snares, that totally limits the animals movement and that's the metaphor. He's saying, I'm not saying this to limit you, **I say this for your own benefit.** And he has to say that because most people feel like Paul is trying to limit them. But Paul says this is for your own **benefit or profit.** We say sometimes to our kids, I'm doing this for your own good and that's the kind of thing he's saying here, I'm saying this for your own good. It's just that what you do with the time and resources you have as a single would have to be for the Lord and not for just selfish things. So how then does it profit you to be single? Well, it profits others primarily but there's a return on the investment. Because if you turn to 1 Cor 10:33 I'll show you how Paul utilized the time as a single. Starting in verse 31, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." You can eat, you can drink, just make sure you do it to the glory of God. Verse 32, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God;" notice, two of those groups are unbelievers and one is believers, Jews and Greeks are unbelievers because if they were believers they'd be part of the Church, and the church of God which are believers. He says give no offense to either the unbelievers or the believers. Verse 33, "just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. How could believers be saved? It's easy enough to see how unbelievers need to be saved. But Paul says give no offense to either group so both groups can be saved. So

unbelievers can be saved from the penalty of sin through the gospel, the believers can be saved from the power of sin through training. That's an argument Paul has yet to make. Believers can be saved from the power of sin through training in the word. But Paul's point is that I don't live for my own benefit or profit, same word as the one used in our passage, 7:35, I live for the profit of others. So then if we come back to 7:35 it really is to our own profit when you get into the return of rewards, but more so to the profit of others now because you can devote more time to the urgent necessities of the gospel, to the urgent necessities of training believers.

So he's not saying this to restrain them, he's saying this for their own benefit and the benefits of others in light of the fact that the time has been shortened and the form of this world is passing away. Finally he explains the benefit, **to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.** The word translated **appropriate** is pretty well translated, you see the opposite word in verse 36, "if any man thinks that he is acting inappropriately," but the idea of the word is from interior design; it's the idea of decorous, attractive, even beautiful. But it's all in light of the Lord's any-moment arrival and the fact that in light of it we ought to think about the urgencies of the gospel we could fulfill more excellently if we were single.

Now we usually look down on singles and think something is wrong with them. Why aren't they married? They should be married. Yet that judgment is not the apostle Paul's. Paul himself wasn't married and he had a fantastic ministry, he was used mightily by the Lord and you and I are still benefitting from his ministry today. And I've known and heard of several singles who were very effective in ministering to others, some male, some female. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, the Messianic Jew who many of you know of and is a great Bible scholar, was evangelized by Ruth Wardell in New York City. She was a single Gentile woman, able to work with Jews immigrating to America and Arnold came to faith as a young boy through her, much to the dislike of his father who was a rabbi. But she spent years working with American Board of Missions to the Jews which is now known as The Friends of Israel. And the kinds of ministry she did she never could have done if she were married. On the male side, David Olander who came here a few weeks ago to fill in for me, is not married. And he's able to travel a lot; went to Germany right after he was here to check on a friend in ministry, went to Israel a couple of weeks ago just to get a feel for what's going on. He's able to have an intensive travelling

ministry that he would not be able to have if he were married. My friend Dan Inghram, retired Marine, lives in Washington, DC, has a church there, teaches at Capital Bible Seminary, can do a lot more ministering than you can if you're married and have a family; your interests are divided if you have all that, not that it's wrong, those are responsibilities. It's just that the time is short and the form of this world is passing away, and what is really important now is the gospel and training other believers.

Now, having gone through the passage, by way of application I think you can see there are two extremes that should be avoided. First of all, the extreme of Protestantism which puts an undue weight on getting married, you got to get married, got to get married, when are you going to get married? Paul would argue that singleness is fine, why are you pushing them to marry. Just because someone doesn't marry doesn't mean they're going homosexual. If they'll devote their interests to the Lord they can do a lot of intensive evangelism and discipleship, a very beneficial thing for the Lord. Second, the extreme of Roman Catholicism which requires clergy to remain celibate. That can't be maintained from this passage. Not all have the gift of celibacy. And we know that from the problems that it's caused. In the end Paul does prefer singleness, but marriage is good too.

In any case, always living in light of His any moment arrival and recognizing that the form of this world is passing away should drive our ethic.

ⁱ <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/05/30/modern-memorial-day/#ixzz1w0EMDmuE>

[Back To The Top](#)

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