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1 Corinthians

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. 1 Corinthians 7:28

In the preceding verse, it was noted that there is no reason to suppose that Paul's words in that verse were a fixed and firm rule, but rather a temporary guide. Verse 28 verifies that. He had just said "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife." His words were spoken because of the difficult circumstances those in Corinth were facing at that time and he wanted them to not be further troubled through the added weight of marriage.

In substantiation of this, he now says, "But even if you do marry, you have not sinned." Therefore, his previous words cannot be considered prescriptive, but rather as an exhortation based on circumstance. Those who do marry are not in violation of his inspired words. Continuing on, he notes that "if a virgin marries, she has not sinned." The same is true with the virgin. No sin has been committed, but it may be that the new couple will face undue hardships because of their decision and in this, Paul says, "but I would spare you." In other words, "I give you advice to spare you from those hardships." He is acting as if a loving father giving advice to his still naive son.

If we consider the soldier who is in battle, of course he would not be thinking about marriage. He is under fire and there is death all around him. However, if he gets a pass to an area which is not under fire, he may meet a young lady and fall in love. His desire is to marry her and never let her go. But he also has the reality

of returning to the battle when the pass has expired. This then may be likened to the situation to which Paul is writing.

There was some sort of hardship at the time of his letter and it would make for a difficult path for newlyweds. In his words, he is giving them advice to alleviate that difficult situation. A commander might write to his young private and say, "You will be coming back to the lines and you could die. Or, your wife's village may come under fire and you might lose her." His words would be an attempt to help him think the issue through. However, in the end, the private will make his choice and whichever way he chooses, unless specifically ordered to the contrary, he will not be considered insubordinate. Such is the case with Paul's advice here.

Life application: The Bible gives explicit commands which require obedience. It also gives words of advice and counsel which, if acted upon, will lead to happiness. If not acted upon, the result isn't sinful, but sadness, loss, or difficulty may be the result. As God made man, and as God gave us the Bible for our instruction, the best route is to always apply it's precepts to our lives.

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, 1 Corinthians 7:29

This verse is generally taken to mean that Paul thought of the coming of the Lord as "right around the corner" and that the expectation for a long and normal life before His coming was unlikely. Although this is possible, it is not the only explanation and it dismisses his words of verse 26 which speak "of the present distress."

Considering his words here with that in mind, a more probable view of what he is speaking of comes to light. He begins with, "But I say, brethren." He continues with the idea that his words are directed to "brethren," meaning believers. It doesn't exclude that his words could be applied to unbelievers, but his concern is to those in the fellowship. For them, they need to consider that "the time is short." The word used here is *sunestalmenos* which means "contracted" or

"drawn up, as if into a narrow space." It is a word which is elsewhere used in the act of "furling" a sail. It goes from being a large, open sheet, to a condensed roll which takes up little space.

So, is Paul referring to the expected return of the Lord, or "of the present distress?" Because he has already referred to the distress of the moment, it seems unlikely that he would suddenly jump to "the return of the Lord" without specifically stating this as a reason for his coming admonition. He isn't going to refer to the coming of the Lord specifically until chapter 11, and that is in the context of taking the Lord's Supper. When he speaks in detail about His coming, it will be in chapter 15. This will be after countless admonitions for the conduct of life, even a long life ahead.

Therefore, the probability strongly suggests that Paul's words are intended for those in Corinth who were facing a high degree of uncertainty because of the conditions around them and they would therefore point to the same for anyone living in a time of exceptional turmoil. If this is the state of things in the world around the believer, he says "that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none."

Without considering the words of the coming verses, what he says here could be misunderstood to mean that no regard should be given to one's wife. This is not his intent, as will be seen. Rather, he is saying that the attitude of clinging to one's wife in the hopes of a long and prosperous marriage isn't recommended. Because of the present distress, one should understand that the wife may be taken away suddenly (through whatever the distress is - plague, famine, war, persecution, etc.).

In such a difficult time, clinging to the marriage as if it were a long and permanent arrangement could certainly lead to heartache and bitterness.

Life application: The context of the times is important when understanding biblical applications. We are to enjoy the things God has blessed us with, but if we

assume that the life we live today will be the same on the morrow, we may find bitterness and disappointment. It would be unwise to expect a good job, a stable family, and a garage full of nice toys during a time of economic collapse. Context is important when evaluating life, just as it is when evaluating the Bible.

...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...

1 Corinthians 7:30

This verse continues the same thought analyzed in the preceding one. To get clarity, we can take the first portion of that verse and apply his words to this portion. It would thus read -

"But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on... 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."

What Paul meant by "the time is short" was discussed in detail in that preceding verse. And because of that reason, he admonishes "those who weep as though they did not weep." It is nearly impossible for us to drown out all emotion, but our emotions can be subdued because of the difficulties which surround us at any given time. In war, a soldier may lose his best friend and not shed a tear, knowing that there isn't time for tears when bullets are still coming his way. It may be that he doesn't mourn his dead friends until after he returns home from battle, or by then he may have completely suppressed the difficulties.

This is true to a varying degree with any emotional trauma when the surrounding circumstances are of a most difficult nature. Paul saw the circumstance of those in Corinth as necessitating the need to not weep over such temporary things. In the same manner, he admonished "those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice." Again, there may be times when giving out a joyful or triumphant shout may not be appropriate.

If a battle is won, but there was immense loss in human life on the side of the victors, is there any true reason to rejoice? Rather, it would be more appropriate to humbly and gratefully acknowledge those who had given their lives for the cause. If a football team were to win a game in which a player had died (on either team), would it be appropriate for the winners to rejoice? No! It would be a time of acknowledgment that a tragedy had occurred.

And finally in this verse, Paul says that because of the present situation, "those who buy" should act "as though they did not possess." If one is living in a time of great upheaval where anarchy filled the streets, would it be wise to go to the store, buy a new TV, and then revel in the great new purchase? No! It would be more likely that the TV would be stolen soon, the house ransacked and even destroyed, and the owners forced to live from moment to moment in a state of terror and privation. It would make no sense to grab the TV as the rioters were banging at the door, holding fast to it as if it would be of use later.

There was some distress at the time of Paul's letter to those in Corinth and Paul wanted to save them from what he knew would be pointless emotion. He was asking them to keep calm, be level in their feelings and attitudes, and to understand that this world is temporary and passing away. And the same should be true with each of us in some measure at all times. The more we cling to this world, the less we will cling to Christ. This is a world of uncertainty, distress, and loss. To overly hold onto it can only lead to increased unhappiness at some point in the future.

Life application: If our hearts, minds, and thoughts are always directed towards Jesus, we will be more prepared for times of trials, sadness, loss, and even an appropriate response to joyful times. If He is our ultimate prize and hope, then the things of the world will necessarily be put into the proper perspective. Let us always and in all things place Him first.

...and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away. 1 Corinthians 7:31

This verse finishes the thought analyzed in the preceding two verses. Again, to get clarity, we can take the first portion and apply his words to this final section. It would thus read as follows -

"But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on... those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away."

Today for this final portion of the thought, Paul says that "those who use this world" should use it "as not misusing *it*." This is speaking of the excess of life that can so easily ensnare us. We live in the world and must use the things of the world to continue to exist, but we are not to allow them to become our prime focus or center of hope and contentment.

Instead, we are to continually reevaluate our state and remember that those things we use and possess all came from the Creator and they are temporary, as is our very body. All these things are "passing away." But there is a greater and eternal hope for those who have called on Christ. If our lives are filled with the lust of the world, then we have shown that this world is our desire and that God is less important to us than the world. John speaks of this exact thought, along with the transitory nature of this world, in his first epistle -

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:15-17

Those things around us which seem fixed and firm are not. Even the mountains erode and can be leveled through a large cataclysm. If such magnificent and seemingly permanent structures are temporary, how much more those things we possess! The terminology for that which "is passing away" calls to mind the fleeting scenes of a movie. Our eyes take in the information and our brains process it, but it is actually gone from before us as soon as the next scene comes.

It is nothing but a memory. This is exactly what Solomon speaks of in the book of Ecclesiastes. In his opening words, he says this -

"Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher;
'Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.'" Ecclesiastes 1:2

The word for "vanity" in this verse is *havel*. It literally means "vapor," or "breath." Solomon warns that just as exhaled breath on a cold morning quickly disappears, so is the sudden disappearance of the world around us. Everything is fleeting except God. Because this is so, we are admonished to call on Him and then remember Him now while we still have the chance. Someday, all things will be made new for those who have called on Christ. It will be an entirely different order and one which will endure for all eternity.

Life application: Don't get so caught up in this temporary world that you miss the greater and eternal world to come. Don't miss out on Christ!

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. 1 Corinthians 7:32

In this verse, Paul reverts back to his words of verse 28 which said, "Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you." After that came the intervening verses to build upon that thought and then this verse which begins with a confirmation that he has their best in mind and his words are intended not as commands, but as heartfelt words of counsel - as if a father to his children. And so he begins with "But I want you to be without care..."

If they will follow his exhortation, they will spare themselves trials and sadness that he is sure are coming because of "the present distress" (verse 26). And so to live "without care" he tells them, as an explanation, that "he who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord." This was his personal state and he knew it to be true. The man who is unmarried, particularly

in times of distress, is not distracted by the marital issues which can complicate one's life in many ways, and which inevitably will cause minds to be distracted from a clear and unhindered relationship with the Lord.

In contrast to this will come his words in the next verse which will be looked at separately.

Life application: Life happens. The more responsibilities we have, the easier it is to get distracted from a single-minded devotion to the Lord. This is particularly true when close relationships are involved. Having a spouse, children, or other family members to care for can cause our minds to be consumed with those details, leaving less time for pursuing Jesus. This does not mean being in such relationships is wrong, but if the world around us is in the middle of a time of distress, it would be better to consider not getting into overly burdensome relationships during such a time.

But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his wife*. 1 Corinthians 7:33

This verse is set in contrast to the preceding one which read, "He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord." When one is single, and if they are directed to the things of Lord, they will naturally care for doing those things which are pleasing to Him. However, the contrast is also usually the case. And so Paul notes it for our reflection by saying, "But he who is married cares about the things of the world." This doesn't mean such a person isn't interested in pleasing the Lord at all, but his allegiances may become skewed, especially during times of distress.

Even if such times don't currently exist, a man still needs to provide for his wife and keep her happy and content, but he can usually do it in a way in which both will be able to direct their lives toward pleasing the Lord. They can attend church together, pray over meals together, talk about the Lord's goodness on walks, etc.

However, if it is a time of distress, the man may become overly consumed with "how he may please *his* wife."

If food is in shortage, the man will spend a great deal of effort in obtaining it in order to feed his beloved and any children that they have. Going to church may become a secondary matter as the time once available for this is lost in the struggle to live. And finding time to stop and praise the Lord in times of privation is naturally harder. This doesn't mean that the love for the Lord is gone, but priorities become skewed during times of upheaval. How much more difficult it is to please the Lord when there are many additional burdens upon the man's heart which he feels he must handle!

Life application: As has been noted over the previous few verses, the context of the times in which a person lives is important to consider when pondering life-changing decisions such as marriage or having children. This is why it is often good to stop and evaluate such decisions rationally and apart from the emotions which tug at our heart strings.

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. 1 Corinthians 7:34

In the same manner as there is a difference between the unmarried and the married man (concerning focus on the Lord and proper allegiances to Him), there is also a difference in the case of women. Paul notes that "There is a difference between a wife and a virgin (meaning a female virgin). He is not at all speaking about the physical difference, but the same difference noted among men from the previous two verses as he next explains.

"The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord." When a believer is unmarried, they have a much better opportunity to keep their minds and thoughts on the Lord. Their actions will be directed towards Him alone, and their

spiritual life will be filled with Him as well. Because of this, "she may be holy both in body and in spirit." Regardless of the surroundings, even in a time of certain distress, her actions will be directed toward Him. On the other hand, Paul notes the contrast which is found in a married woman by beginning with "but."

"But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please *her* husband." When a woman marries, she is bound to her husband and will naturally set her affections on him. In a time of distress, this may be even more so. The cares of their marriage, the thought of losing him, and the separations which might arise may consume her mental and emotional strength and even debilitate her physically. When this occurs, she is no longer focusing on the Lord as much as the virgin would be.

Having said this, Paul is not in any way saying to not marry. Nor is he saying that there is anything wrong with marriage. He is speaking to those in Corinth at a time when there is a "present distress" as verse 26 noted. This distress, whatever it may have been, could only increase the troubles and trials associated with a marriage.

A good example of the divided allegiances that result in such an instance is found in the sisters Martha and Mary. One was worried about many things when Jesus was in the house. At the same time, Mary was content to sit and listen to Jesus. The account is found in Luke 10 and is a great example of what Paul is relaying concerning this issue of marriage even though it isn't specifically speaking of marriage. Martha, like the married woman, was concerned with many things and her priorities reflected that -

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 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." Luke 10:38-42

Life application: What is your priority? Are you following Christ, reading His word, and listening to the prompting of the Spirit in your life? Or, are you being distracted by many things and allowing them to shut His presence out of this one life He has granted you before you stand before Him? Make sure to spend this valuable time wisely. Spend it with Christ.

Time is fleeting Lord and the days go so fast

And yet there is so much for me to do

But when the sun is setting and the day is past

I look back and see I spent too little time with You

And so I commit to spending more time with You on the morrow

Surely I will do better when the sun rises anew

But at the end of the next day, again I'm filled with sorrow

I failed again, O Lord, to spend precious time with You

O God, give me a wise and discerning heart

Grant me the resolve to open Your word as I should do

And to walk with You and talk with You, yes help me to start

To spend my quickly fleeting life in sincere fellowship with You

And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

1 Corinthians 7:35

Paul's words, "And this I say" is referring to the instructions on marriage that he has given from verses 25-34. In this, his words were "for your own profit." Explained differently, what he has said is advice which is meant to help those in Corinth and to assist them in their thinking about the issue. Remember, in verse 26, he wrote of the "present distress" which they were facing. As a person who understood the complexities of the times and was able to process them in a valid Christian context, his words were intended as general guides for a sound life through that distress.

This is certain that the words are only recommendations and not directives because he next says that it was "not that I may put a leash on you." The word translated as "leash" is the Greek *brochon*. This is its only use in Scripture and it implies a noose, snare, or cord which is used to restrain something or someone. The gist of his words then are that he was not intending to bind them with a man-made rule and thus add to the gospel of freedom which is found in Christ, nor to bind them from anything lawful within the society which didn't contradict the gospel, but rather his intent was to provide sound, helpful, and fatherly advice for their welfare.

In contrast to such an over-reaching command, Paul simply wanted them to consider "what is proper" in order that "you may serve the Lord without distraction." His intent then was solely for their good during the "present distress" and his words are not to be considered directives for any time at any point of the church age. Rather, in times of upheaval and distress, believers should be able to go to Paul's words and determine a sound course of action that will keep them from trials and heartache, and yet able to serve the Lord fully and without additional burdens which could take away that full devotion.

Life application: Again we see the importance of context. Reading a single verse and applying it without context inevitably leads to crummy doctrine. But by checking the context of what is given, we can be certain that we are on the right path in our walk and in good stead with the Lord.

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. 1 Corinthians 7:36

It is generally agreed that this verse is speaking of a man who is responsible for a virgin daughter or who otherwise has the charge and responsibility over the young woman. There is an age where she will naturally be inclined to want the company of a man, even if there is a time of distress occurring in the world. Just because there may be, it doesn't change the natural process of her life. Eventually, she will be tempted to express those desires if she is not allowed to marry.

The one in charge of her should understand this and may eventually feel that his care of her, even if it is for her own good, may cause her to sin if he doesn't allow her to get married. And so when she reaches or exceeds that point by becoming "past the flower of her youth," Paul says that he may "do what he wishes" by giving her away in marriage.

It is more preferable to do this than it would be to restrict her from marriage and eventually cause her to act on her natural impulses in a sinful way. Obviously, the world is different today and parents don't exercise the same control over their children than they once did. The custom of prearranged marriages is all but over and instead the decision is left up to the one marrying. Now however, even under the best of circumstances, parents may agree to the marriage, but there is little control exercised by them over the "who" and the "when" of it.

Regardless of this, whether it is the arranging of a marriage or simply the "nod of consent" to it, if the girl is of marrying age and his approval is given "he does not sin." Instead Paul says that it is ok to "let them marry." Again, all of this is based on the "present distress" which was referred to in verse 26 and has been cited as a general guideline for such an instance. For the past 2000 years, marriages have continued as normal during the time that the church awaits the return of Christ.

Life application: Marriage has been ordained by God. Likewise the urges and desires for marriage were instilled in us by God. It is better to marry than to sin against Him by engaging in sex apart from marriage. And so even in times of distress, the situation and circumstances of marriage must be carefully considered for the good of all involved.

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. 1 Corinthians 7:37

These words are set in contrast to what was stated in verse 36. It is assumed from these verses, and known from the customs of the times, that the father had control over his daughter's marriage decisions. Unlike the world today where young people fall in love and decide who they will marry, those in the Roman empire were simply told who they would marry and when. It might be that in the afternoon a father could come home and say, "Tomorrow you will marry a man I met today." Arranged marriages were the standard, not the exception.

Paul noted previously that the father didn't sin if he allowed his virgin daughter to marry. And now he introduces the contrast by saying, "Nevertheless..." What was said is acceptable, but there is another point to consider. And all of it is based on the "present distress" already noted in verse 26. Because of this difficulty "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."

By withholding marriage from his virgin daughter, he is doing well because he will keep her from the great troubles which were expected at this time of distress. Someone had to tend to her, be it him or her new husband. Because she was already in the home and because there was no external need to marry her off, they could ride this time of distress through together without causing sin. The idea here is that if keeping her from marrying would cause her to be tempted to the point of losing her virginity, then it would be sin. If this wasn't the case, then they were doing well by having her not get married.

Life application: Paul's words continuously show his regard for purity, holiness, and keeping sin at bay. If we can learn from his examples and his words of instruction, how much easier will our lives be and how much more pleasing to the Lord will we walk!

So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better. 1 Corinthians 7:38

Having stated his instructions on the giving of one's virgin in marriage, Paul sums the thought up in today's verse beginning with, "So then he who give *her* in marriage does well." He has not erred in his actions nor sinned against God by them. He has given a wife to a husband and his virgin to a man for her care and protection. Even if this were during a time of "distress," no wrongdoing has occurred.

Having said that, Paul then notes the contrast by saying, "but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better." He cannot be speaking of "better" in a moral sense because if so, then the other chosen path would have been morally deficient. The better moral path should always be chosen. Instead, "better" must refer to the issue of the distress of the times. For the sake of the virgin, by withholding marriage it would be a better expedient for the care of her heart and any possible sadness which might result from the challenges which lay ahead.

Life application: If a path can be taken which avoids the pitfalls of heartache and sadness, it is certainly the better one to choose. Getting ourselves into trials and difficulties should naturally be avoided because we are then much more likely to have freedom to praise God instead of worrying about the trials which surround us.

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.

1 Corinthians 7:39

Paul's words now are probably a direct response to a question put forth by the Corinthians. However, even if not directly asked, they still provide a well-rounded summary of his previous thoughts on marriage. First he reiterates his earlier words by stating that "a wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives." This "law" is speaking of that of God from the beginning of creation, conscience in Christ, and New Testament theology; not the Old Testament law which has been set aside because of the work of Christ.

As long as the husband is alive, she is bound to him. However, "if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes." Again in this verse, it is implicitly seen that the giving of a virgin in marriage was done by the one who had responsibility over her, not by her own choice. This is unlike today where that right is generally granted to those getting married and by mutual consent. Having noted that, for the widow, there were no restrictions and the choice to remarry was hers "to whom she wishes." Paul speaks of the widow's freedom from her marriage in Romans 7 -

"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 then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man." Romans 7:2, 3

Understanding that a woman is freed from the marriage by the death of her husband, and that she is free to marry whom she wishes, Paul adds in one caveat requiring her obedience which is that she must marry "only in the Lord." Regardless of whether her previous husband was a believer or not, if she is a believer, she is required to marry a Christian. Several reasons for this should be obvious, but above all, her consideration of Christ as her Head is the most important. How could she be honoring Christ by allowing a non-Christian the authority over her? Paul speaks of the headship of Christ over man and the headship of the husband over the wife in 1 Corinthians 11. Her marriage to a non-believer would ultimately be dishonoring of Christ.

Paul gives this same general guideline in 2 Corinthians 6:4 when he says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Marriage implies a yoke and to be yoked to a non-believer in marriage would certainly be an unequal yoking. Therefore, Paul's words are intended to honor Christ and ensure that He is exalted in our lives.

Life application: Heartstrings are far less important than obedience. When making decisions in life, the first and most important consideration is our allegiance to Christ. We need to make sure that our emotions don't drive our decisions lest we be led astray from a proper walk with Him.