

1Co13 – That Crazy Singleness Chapter– 1 Corinthians 7:17-40
Pastor Dave Shepardson Calvary Chapel Nuevo / www.wordbymail.com

Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “That Crazy Singleness Chapter.” We’re in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7, the second half.

Last message we did “That Crazy Marriage Chapter” looking at the first half of 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 and I’m using this word “crazy” in these titles because this chapter has the ability to make Christians crazy. The way we keep from having this chapter make us crazy is that we understand the context that it was written in. This is a chapter of pastoral counseling in writing. The Church in Corinth had some specific questions, they wrote them down and sent them to Paul who was in Ephesus, and Paul is sending his counseling back to them. So we are looking at this text as pastoral counsel in response to very specific questions and a specific church at a specific time.

But we explained last message the Corinthians haven’t simply written to Paul and said, “Please answer this question.” But because of the divisive factions that existed in the church they are actually saying “Some of us think this, and some of us think that. What do you say?”

And so Paul is giving pastoral counsel here and trying not to throw gasoline on the fire of conflict that is already burning in the church. We did the background last week – so today we can pray and go.

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, please, your Word is living and powerful. It’s active. It discerns the thoughts and intents of our heart. Lord, it is your scalpel. And so today in this unique chapter put us in the right place that we would understand this pastoral counseling under the inspiration of your Spirit and that we would see how this Word applies specifically to each of our lives today. We pray, Lord, that you would speak to us through your Word, in your name Jesus, amen.

Paul begins the second half of 1 Corinthians 7 with the most important point (M.I.P.) of this entire section. And this is perfect for us because we must get a hold of the “big picture” Paul is trying to get across here. Just like in the first half of this chapter, there can be many “What about this’s?” and “Yeah – but...” in this section. So we have to make the summary statement, the most important point, really clear to keep us off the tangent trail.

So let’s read verse 17 – then we’ll make the M.I.P. clear before we dive into these verses.

1 Corinthians 7:17 (NLT)

17 Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches.

This is the all encompassing summary statement for this entire section.

Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you.

Paul is not saying your current life status should *never* change. He's saying that "changing your current life status" *must not* be your primary focus but learning to serve the Lord *right where you're at must be* your primary focus.

So here is the M.I.P. today.

Most Important Point

As a Christ follower, your current life status *must not* be your primary focus. Being faithful to the Lord *within* your current life status *must be* your primary focus.

Three times in our text Paul makes this crystal clear and if we with hold on to this M.I.P. it will keep us from going crazy in this chapter.

We have a message in our "**Joshua**" series called "**Grow Where You're Planted**" (Message #19 in the series – you can get that at wordbymail.com) and that would be a good message for you if this section of 1 Corinthians 7 shakes you up today.

Fist we've got to commit to wholly follow the Lord right where we find ourselves *then* God can work with us.

And so to start things off here today Paul gives two examples to clarify what he's getting at.

1 Corinthians 7:18-20 (NLT) (example 1)

18 For instance (example), a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it (huh?). And the man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised now.

19 For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God's commandments. (And then, a repeat of the summary statement→)

20 Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you.

Now, don't get caught up in verse 1 making reference to "reversing circumcision." Circumcision is the sign of a person's commitment to follow the Laws of Moses and the sign that you were Jewish. And Paul's saying – if you were a Jew when you committed your life to Christ, don't try to start living as a Gentile and if you were a Gentile when you committed your life to Christ – don't try to start living as a Jew.

Verse 19 says – ***The important thing is to KEEP God's Commands.***

The example points to the subject at hand... the important thing is *not* whether you are *married* or *single*. The important thing is – are you *obeying and following* the Lord *right where you're at*?

And then a second example. 1 Corinthians 7:21-24.

1 Corinthians 7:21 (NLT)

21 Are you a slave? Don't let that worry you (don't let that be your focus) - ***but if you get a chance to be free, take it.*** (counseling)

Remember being a "slave" in the first century was (most often) not like being a "slave" in the early years of our country.

This word DOULOS – often translated "Bondservant" which means a "*slave by choice*" or "*by contract.*"

And so Paul says if you were a *slave* (by choice or contract) when the Lord called you, don't let that worry you. Your "life status" does not hinder you from *serving* the Lord. You can serve the Lord perfectly well as a *slave* but if you get a chance to *not* be a slave you should definitely take it.

And then I love the "play on words" in verse 22.

1 Corinthians 7:22 (NLT)

22 And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ.

Paul is turning these words into "spiritual terms" now because *all* true Christ followers become *bondservants* (slaves) to the Lord Jesus.

And so he says in 1 Corinthians 7:23,

1 Corinthians 7:23 (NLT)

23 God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world. (taking the word “slave” from physical to spiritual)

And then we read the summary statement for the third time.

1 Corinthians 7:24 (NLT)

24 Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you.

Don't be consumed with changing your *life status*. Be consumed with being a *Christ follower* right in the “life status” you're in.

Then with that lead in, Paul moves on to the next question from the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 7:25 (NLT)

25 Now regarding your question about the young women who are not yet married. I do not have a command from the Lord for them. But the Lord in his mercy has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you.

Paul takes up the next question asked by the Corinthians and the NLT addresses this answer to “*the young women who are not yet married*”

The Greek word is actually VIRGINS and so in the broadest context this is to *all* those who are *not* married. And (like last message) Paul says ***I do not have a command from the Lord for them*** meaning Jesus never *specifically addressed* this question and Paul does not have a *specific revelation* on it from the Lord. And so Paul *does not* write this as a command, instead he writes it as *pastoral counsel*. But his answer *is inspired* like all scripture and God wants us to learn from it and *apply* it (correctly) to our lives.

And then he gives his counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:26.

1 Corinthians 7:26 (NLT)

26 Because of the present crisis, I think it is best to remain as you are. (Meaning in whatever Life-Status you're currently in)

Some scholars view this *present crisis* as something short-term and specific to the church in Corinth in the first century. Some scholars view this *present crisis* as the entire Church Age up to the return of Christ and it seems Paul *could be* referring (to some extent) to both.

There are certainly specific times of difficulty when we should not be focused on changing our marital status but instead we should be focused on clinging tightly to the

Lord in order to get through the present difficulty. *And* in the bigger sense, serving the Lord is our top priority at *all times* because the Lord *is coming back soon*.

And so Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28.

1 Corinthians 7:27-28 (NLT)

27(in light of this present crisis mentioned in verse 26) *If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married.*

28 *But* (confirming this is NOT a command) *if you do get married, it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin.* (Then Paul explains WHY he's giving this counsel) *However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you those problems.*

If we will keep the *context* correct here this chapter will *not* make us crazy. Paul is giving specific counsel in response to a specific question and we are looking over his shoulder and asking what can we learn or how can we apply this counsel to *our own lives*.

And Paul gives us his reason for his counsel to the Corinthians at the end of verse 28 *those who get married at this time will have troubles and I'm trying to SPARE YOU those problems*

It seems Paul is referring to specific trouble the Church in Corinth was experiencing at this time and he says (again) *in this difficult time* do not make changing your marital status your top priority. Make serving the Lord your top priority.

But then in the larger scope he says in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31,

1 Corinthians 7:29-31 (NLT)

29 *But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage.*

30 *Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions.*

31 *Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away.*

Now Paul jumps to the bigger picture of this world passing away and verse 29 is hard to translate. But the NLT gets the *correct sense* – *Even those who are married should not focus ONLY on their marriage* because our top priority is serving the Lord, not serving our desired “*life status*.”

Then Paul shoots of four quick comparisons (verse 30) to say clearly *do not* make the things of *this life* your primary focus including your marital status ***because this world as we know it will soon pass away.***

And then Paul is going to explain his counsel to the Corinthians so we can kind of understand where he's coming from. This may be hard for some of us "to receive" but this is just some very practical counseling.

1 Corinthians 7:32-34 (NLT)

32 I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him.

33 But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife.

34 His interests are divided. (Not saying it's BAD, it's just the facts) ***In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband.*** (Again, not saying it's BAD, it's just the facts)

We don't know the background of Paul's pastoral counsel to the Corinthians but we don't need to because the encouragement is *clear*, and this encouragement is specifically for single people.

Paul says ***I want you to be free from the concerns of this life*** and if you are single you will have a much *easier time* focusing on the Lord and doing *his work*. It's simple math – there are only *so many hours* in the day and you only have so much energy, and if you're married you have to divide those hours and you have to divide that energy between *serving the Lord* and *serving your spouse*. And that's not bad *it's the way it should be when you're married*. Paul is simply saying when you're single you have more time and energy to serve the Lord (at least *theoretically*).

I think single people have a hard time accepting this counsel maybe because God *did* make us to be married. *Nevertheless* Paul's facts are correct and we *can* gain good insight from them.

Then Paul summarizes and clarifies his counsel to the Corinthians and (maybe) to us as well.

1 Corinthians 7:35 (NLT)

35 I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.

To those who are single Paul says *I'm NOT saying that you CAN'T get married.* I'm just trying to help you see the *benefit* of being single.

Do you see it?

And here (in verse 35) we have what is really the grand summary of this entire chapter.

I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.

Again, the focus (the priority) is **How we can BEST SERVE the LORD.**

But then Paul flips back to those who can't handle being single. (And just a translation note), these verses can also be translated to refer to an *unmarried daughter* and so your Translation *MAY take* that approach.

1 Corinthians 7:36-37 (NLT)

36 But if a man thinks that he's treating his fiancée improperly and will inevitably give in to his passion, let him marry her as he wishes. It is not a sin.

37 But if he has decided firmly not to marry and there is no urgency and he can control his passion, he does well not to marry.

And then in a perfect example of balanced pastoral counsel, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:38,

1 Corinthians 7:38 (NLT)

38 So the person who marries his fiancée does well, and the person who doesn't marry does even better.

So in the light of the "*present crisis*" (from verse 26) that Paul says is counseling the church in Corinth through Paul says...

If you need to get married – *marriage is good.* But if you can be single and serve the Lord wholeheartedly *that's even better.*

I know that may not sound like encouragement to some single people, but if God gives you the gift of being single, this is great encouragement.

And then Paul repeats his encouragement for widows.

1 Corinthians 7:39-40 (NLT)

39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if he loves the Lord (no unequally yoked marriages).

40 But in my opinion it would be better for her to stay single, and I think I am giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this.

Of course a believing widow is free to re-marry as long as it's to another believer. But Paul say one last time... if that widow is *gifted* by the Lord to remain single, they will have more opportunity to serve the Lord, and so from an eternal perspective, *that is better.*

And so closes the crazy chapter on marriage and singleness. And let me remind you, in verse 7 of this chapter, speaking of those married *and* those single, Paul says ***Yet each person has a special gift (Charisma) from God, of one kind or another*** (referring to marital status).

Can you see your marital status today as a *gift from God*?

If you are married – “Praise the Lord” you can serve the Lord *within the needs* of your marriage.

And if you are single today – “Praise the Lord” – you can serve the Lord with some *additional “freedoms.”*

But either way – whether married or single – can you please remember the most important point of today's message...

As a Christ follower, your current life status *must not be* your primary focus. Being faithful to the Lord *within* your current life status *must be* your primary focus.

It's about our life priority. Not about our current life status.

Let's pray. *Lord, Jesus, what great counsel in your Word. It's so incredible that we can look over the Apostle Paul's shoulder as he counsels the Corinthians, and we can say, yeah that applies to my life. Holy Spirit, you can apply this message to each of our lives, individually, severally, Lord. You can apply this to our lives. Would you, Lord? Would you do it right now?*

Would you just respond to the Lord about what you've heard? Would you speak to him about your current life status, your current marital status? And maybe you would need to start with some repentance. Say Lord, *“I'm sorry that I've been trying to force you to*

change my life status. Lord may I see where I'm at as a gift. A place that you've placed me for a time and for a season and for a reason. And Lord, may I commit wholeheartedly to serve you without fail right where I'm at."

And if you're single would you just ask yourself if you can see that as a gift from God and thank him for it. Not forever, but for a season. And if you're married today, it might be harder than the singles. Can you see your marriage as a gift from God? That he has placed you right where you're at knowing all the trials and all the troubles and all the tribulation. And can you thank him, not by what you see, but by what you believe?

Lord we pray, whether married or single, we pray Lord, that changing our life status would not be our consuming focus. But serving you would be our consuming focus, Lord. May we cling to you in whatever state of life we're in and may you work in our lives. For your glory and in your name Jesus, amen.