

Take-Aways for Small Group Leaders to Consider

In this text Paul is dealing with questions posed by the Corinthians, but Paul (a lot like Jesus) does not accept the questions as the correct agenda and does not limit his answers to what is asked.

Lawyers are taught that if they can convince an appellate court to focus on the issues favorable to the lawyer's position that lawyer is likely to win the argument. Here, Paul responds by answering the questions (which are often posed to justify a position, e.g. the rich, young ruler) by going deeper and not allowing a single person or a married person off the hook. Paul has taken a clue from Jesus, who demands top priority of all Christians, both marrieds and singles.

Commentary of the writer of this Guide to the 4 questions under "Analyze the text":

1. (7:25-28) Paul argues when you're unmarried you are free to concentrate on pleasing the Master. Marriage is not for the faint of heart; it presses together two distinct individuals with different personalities, different backgrounds, and lots of baggage (two sinners). Marriage won't necessarily solve your problems, make you happy, make you a better person, or bring you closer to God. The happiest married people are usually the happiest single people.

Paul's view of marriage seems to be a relationship in which two partners are committed to meet the needs of the other, which is quite a challenge to the prevalent patriarchal ancient world in which husband is master. Paul's vision should cause us to examine the false images of marriage and sex in our culture.

2. (7:29-31) Paul gives his reasons for why those unmarried should remain that way:
 - (1) "Time is short." Paul expects Jesus' return and judgment on the world in the very near future; Thus, ordinary temporal matters are of much less significance in light of eschatological judgment. Paul says to those that are married: enjoy marriage, but don't let it be more important than God. So too with the world. Use this short life for eternal purposes. Love not the world, neither the things of the world.
 - (2) "The married man will experience worldly troubles"- and Paul would spare them of that (v.28b). We don't know exactly what Paul means here, but we do know that he thinks marriage will bring complications and responsibilities that will cause believers to be distracted from their ultimate goal of loving Christ first. He also wants believers to make sure their *primary* concern isn't about the day-to-day affairs (thus prioritizing relationships, material possessions, and worldly dealings accordingly) but about things with eternal value.
3. (7:32-35) Marriage requires rightful concern for spouse (and although Paul does not mention them, children, in-laws, etc.) and Paul wants people to be free from such concerns so they can be devoted to Christ. Paul indicates that single life makes it easier to maintain the proper priorities of life. Paul seeks to free us from anxieties. Single life makes possible a degree of dedication to the work of Christ that married life does not allow. Ultimately, Paul's concern is that marriage has the potential to hinder a Christian's single-minded devotion to the mission of the church.
4. (7:36-40) He who marries his fiancé does well; he who refrains from marriage does better. Paul has two important thoughts: (1) marriage is for life, and (2) arguably, Christians should only marry Christians (majority view of verse 39 – "he must belong to the Lord."). In addition, Paul cautions the widow who is tempted to remarry for the sole reason of companionship to "Be careful."

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Take 5-10 minutes to discuss last week's sermon.

INTRO TO THE TEXT

(1 Corinthians - The Challenges of Life Together)

Paul considers Corinth a Christian community in one of the great centers of trade, politics, and pagan religion in the Roman Empire. He now addresses topics that the Corinthians had asked about (7:1 – “Now for the matters you wrote about.”) so they might discover how their devotion to Christ should affect their views of singleness, sex, and marriage. But the concerns of the Corinthians do not set the agenda. After he affirmed the holiness of marriage and emphasizes the spiritual influence of a believer with an unbeliever (7:14-16), Paul emphasizes the advantages of the single life. Paul reframes the agenda and calls the community to be resocialized into a culture shaped by the gospel of the cross with full allegiance to a demanding Savior.

READ 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

ANALYZE THE TEXT

To make the Corinthians think, Paul argues (conceding Jesus gave no explicit direction) his own opinions that provide an invitation to reflection:

1. Are singles better able to cope with troubles? (7:25-28)
2. Do singles better maintain spiritual priorities? (7:29-31)
3. Do singles have fewer distractions? (7:32-35)
4. Consider that singles have the option of marriage. (7:36-40) How do we encourage men and women as they pray through this decision? How do we encourage married couples based on this passage in their pursuit of godliness?

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

Consider the 1 Corinthians text and compare it to the story told in Luke 9 where two men wanted to follow

Jesus but one first wanted to bury his father (and Jesus said, “Let the dead bury their own dead...”) and the second wanted to say good-bye to his family (and Jesus said, in effect, “I expect to be your first priority, even more than your family.”). If Paul did not know of the account penned by Luke, he certainly knew the Master. But following Jesus is not easy, whether single or married. Is Paul focused on singles or marrieds or on the Christian life?

APPLY

Do we believe that (1) married life is good and proper, but so is single life, and (2) we live not for this passing world, but for the greater life that awaits us? If so, why do we Christians fail to give loyalty and priority to Jesus over spouse and family? Whether married or single, Christians should live as if the end of the world is at hand.

1. Concerning marriage and singleness, how are we similar to and different from the people of Corinth?
2. Is singleness a problem in our day? Do we place too much emphasis on marriage as a key to happiness?
3. Would Paul's opinions help a couple (young or old) decide whether to marry, wait, or separate in 2018?
4. What does this text say to all Christians about marriage and devotion to Christ?
5. Think practically and personally: Whether married or single, what truth from this text did you need to hear and how can you begin living into that truth starting this week?

MEMORIZE

1 Corinthians 7:35(b) *“But that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*

FOR FURTHER READING

“Instinctive is the Sermon” by Keith R. Krell at Saints Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians