

Words of Wisdom for Those (Still) Waiting to be Wed
1 Corinthians 7:25 – 40 | 07.24.2016 | Body Life @OBC

Over the last few weeks, we've seen how Paul has addressed the Corinthians with regard to a number of difficult subjects . . .

In ch. 5 . . . he focused on the public scandal of a man having his father's wife
And he called the church to hand the man over to Satan for the
destruction of his flesh and the salvation of his soul.

In ch. 6 . . . He questioned why the Corinthians could not handle their own affairs
without involving the courts . . . in this he reinforced the point, that
churches have been authorized by God to confront sin / grant counsel

Then beginning in 6:9 . . . Paul began to apply the gospel to all matters sexual—

6:9 – 11 He reminded the Corinthians (all Xians) of the redeeming work of X
... tho' their background is replete w/ sexual sin . . . they've been washed clean

The same is true for any here today . . . there's no sin that can't be pardoned/purifies

. . . The good news is that forgiveness comes by faith in Jesus Christ

. . . And the effect of believing that GN is that God the Holy Spirit gives power to live a new way

This is what Paul says next in 6:12 – 20

He calls these saints to walk in holiness . . . and to glorify God with their bodies

Ch. 7 Is the outworking of that gospel reality . . . letting your identity in Christ
redeem your sexual sin . . . to resurrect your marriage or singleness

So far . . . we've spent most of our time talking about marriage, divorce, remarriage

This morning . . . we turn to focus on singleness . . . and singles who are considering M

What we need to see is that Paul . . . as a loving father is not giving harsh commands

Rather, his inspired words . . . like Sol's Proverbs are gracious and godly counsel

And nowhere is this more evident than in his judicious counsel in ch 7:25 – 40

1 Corinthians 7:25 – 40

In 1 Corinthians we've seen how Paul can speak with different tones of voice

. . . While he is more than capable of offering strong commands (and strong grace)

. . . He is also adept at giving pastoral counsel . . . with great tact and tenderness

He's done that in vv 6, 10, 12 and now again in v. 25:

"I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment (ESV, NIV) . . .
or opinion (NASB, HCSB)" . . . or wise counsel (TDNT)

Paul uses this word (*gnōmē*) again in verse 40.

"Judgment" bookends our passage . . . it shapes how we hear his voice.

. . . As someone made trustworthy by the mercy of God (v. 25) . . .

. . . And as someone led by the Holy Spirit (v. 40) . . .

Paul offers wise counsel to those who are single, the virgins in Corinth and those whose are betrothed to them.

On the whole . . . we easily grasp HOW Paul is speaking to the Corinthians in ch. 7

But we face a greater difficulty . . . when we ask: WHO is he speaking to / about?

The difficulty can be found in a comparison of translations.

Some (~ ESV) translate *parthenos* (the word for virgin) as betrothed and read v. 36 – 38 as speaking to young men engaged to virgins – unmarried women

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, . . .

Here the ESV understands Paul to be speaking to the young man and the woman he's pledged to marry . . . and this continues until v. 38 which reads:

³⁸ So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

That's one rendering . . .

The other (~ NAS) understand Paul to be addressing the fathers of young women, so v. 36 reads

But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

How are we to think about this?

1. **The C's know exactly what he's saying even if we don't.** He's answering their question, he knows them personally, and he's addressing the situation in C. So, even if we can't figure out all the angles, we can trust his counsel. **Clarity of Scripture isn't in doubt – BUT THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE'S CLARITY \neq EVERYTHING IS EQUALLY CLEAR**
2. **The Greek can be translated either way.** . . . Most literally, P says "his virgin" (3x) The virgin in view is clearly a woman, but with only the pronoun "his," it could be the fathers daughter or the man's betrothed.
3. **The cultural background could accept either position.**

Because fathers were called on to care for and protect their daughters it makes sense that *in light of the current distress* . . . Paul would encourage fathers to have a say in their daughter's marital freedom. **Fathers – I suspect you do the same**

ATST, it is entirely plausible for P to speak to young men about their betrothal. To those whose passions are strong . . . get married. To others, who have greater control, his counsel to remain unmarried as it frees them to serve God.

4. **In the end = I'm inclined to think the cultural background sides with the young man translation** . . . but I think there's a problem with both positions

If P is speaking to fathers, it seems the woman has little to say of her future. Is that right? Clearly, the widow in v. 39 is free to decide if she will marry. Does the daughter? Maybe this is just a modern problem . . . but I wonder.

But this problem is lesser, in my estimation, than the other problem . . .

If Paul is speaking to young men and encouraging some *NOT* to marry, does that mean the virgin remains his ?? Can she not marry someone else? – **READ v. 37**

Is Paul saying she must remain permanently betrothed, but never married?

I can't imagine that he is . . . and yet in the culture of Corinth . . . I think he most likely speaking to unmarried men . . .

After all . . . you can imagine the need for wisdom these young believers had as they came out lifestyles of sexual promiscuity.

So in light of the big picture, I'm inclined to read Paul's wisdom going to single men and women . . . YET, with that said . . . I don't know all the details.

And I'm not sure any of us can . . .

So what can we know?

We can know Paul is answering questions... and giving wise counsel to the Cor

In this . . . we are watching how someone anchored to the gospel gives careful, gentle responses to very complex matters.

Unlike the political pundits on network TV today, he doesn't throw equal weight behind every statement.

He is measured and wise . . . he gives maxims but also exceptions; he shows where Jesus has spoken clearly and he also exercises caution.

In this he models how the tone and temperament we should employ as we talk about difficult subjects . . .

ATST we can know he cares a great deal for singles & challenges they face

Unlike many churches who promote marriage and push singles into 30-something silos . . . Paul affirms the single life –

For him, singleness isn't odd but good . . .

Thus, we must not isolate singles in our church to some minor league status

We must welcome them and enfold them into the life of the church . . . even learning from them as they wholly devote themselves to the Lord.

If you are here AND SINGLE . . . I'm so glad.

. . . I pray that you will find a family here you can call your own . . .
. . . for singleness is not a call to loneliness, it is a call to make Christ
and his bride your first love.

LAST even if we can't figure out exactly who he is speaking to

We can know what Paul's main point is . . .

Namely in whatever you do . . . you're to receive it as God's calling . . . with a constant awareness . . . that this life is light & momentary

To say it another way: everything in life is to be leveraged for Christ's sake.

AND No one needs to hear this truth more than singles who are looking to invest their whole life in something – SOMEONE – who is not God.

Indeed, that is the specific context of Paul's words

He is not simply giving life principles to singles:
He is speaking to singles who considering marriage.

Look at what he does: After addressing "virgins" in v 25, he draws 5 pictures in v 26–40

These pictures form a collage that warns every one of us the weight of marriage.

Paul knows marriages comes with risks and responsibilities . . .

In fact . . . b/c of P's previous career path as a Pharisee, there's reason to believe he himself experienced the hardship of marriage and was now himself a widow

And so for those considering marriage or remarriage, Paul paints 5 pictures about the sobering and difficult realities of marriage.

And we can see the outlines of these pictures, because of the frames he puts on each.

In verse 26 – 28, Paul paints a picture of marriage in the context of war . . . every H + W must grapple with the distress and troubles present in the world.

v. 26

v. 28

Next, in vv. 29 – 31, Paul paints a picture of marriage with disappearing ink. He stresses the momentariness of marriage because time on this earth is short.

v. 29

v. 31

The third picture chains spouses to one another and to the Lord and speaks of the way marriage increases earthly anxieties and rightly divides attention.

v. 32

v. 35

Finally, the fourth and fifth pictures can be taken together. And they urge address young men (or fathers) and widows to weigh carefully their own hearts in re: to M.

These verses do not have the same framework as the others.

It it's as if . . . Paul finishes up this section like he finishes a letter:,

He speeds up his prose, causing the form of his argument to break.

Nevertheless, his picture is clear – before stepping into marriage, you need to weigh our hearts

The Mayhem of Marriage (v. 26 – 28)

The first portrait speaks of the difficulties assoc. w/ marriage = 'The Mayhem of Marriage'

v 26 reiterates the theme of the chapter: Be content in whatever situation God calls

P reasons that because of present distress/crisis ... better to remain as you are

Some have taken this to mean . . . that Paul foresees a future crisis . . .

Others have seen a present difficulty in view . . . famine or something like it.

But I don't think it's necessary to pit the present vs future . . .

v. 28 = speaks of worldly troubles here and now . . .

v. 29 = the time is drawing short . . . Christ could return at any time

There's trouble now . . . and trouble that's coming

Until X returns . . . those who follow him will suffer many kinds of hardship

So . . .

It is with the sounds of war in the background that Paul says . . .

It is good for a person to remain as he is . . .

Are you bound to a wife? DO NOT SEEK TO BE FREE

Are you free from a wife? DO NOT SEEK A WIFE

He is not forbidding marriage . . . for he says in **v. 28** . . . **READ**

He's saying in this troubled world . . .

marriage will not lessen your burdens . . . it will increase them.

Think about it . . .

Marriage is the union of two sinners . . . it is the commitment to love and live with, to forgive and forebear with a fallible human being

So in its very makeup . . . marriage is filled with difficulty.

But even more . . . Paul is saying the external world may give pause to those seeking M

This was certainly the case for Dietrich Bonhoeffer . . .

The man who wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* . . . and stood up against Hitler's state church and started two seminaries in the thick of WWII . . .

He became engaged . . . but never married. Not by choice but because of war.

Paul's caution about marriage echoes Jesus words

Our Lord said in the Gospels: "Woe to women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days."

This isn't a slight against my wife . . . only that when war overtakes pregnant women . . . husbands cannot flee by themselves . . . they must carry their family

The blessing of marriage becomes a burden in the face of this world's mayhem .

So . . . count the cost.

Marriage isn't a vocation that SECURES peace / comfort in this world.

Just the opposite . . . in a fallen world . . . marriage increases the intensity and frequency of earthly hardships.

This is the first picture of marriage – a bride and groom living in a war zone

The Momentariness of Marriage (v. 29 – 31)

→ The second portrait comes in vv. 29 – 31 and is written with disappearing ink.

Meaning . . . that marriage in this world is short-lived.

29 “The appointed time has grown near” = the time every person has is fleeting . . .

31 “The present world is passing away” = the way things are now, won’t continue forever

In these two descriptions, P recalls the shortness of our lives, . . .

. . . but his point is more than the sands of time running thru the hour glass

There is something qualitatively different about the Xian who awaits X’s return.

And that difference is seen in Paul’s five-fold command in vv. 29b – 30 = **READ**

What is he talking about?

- He doesn’t mean spouses should quit marriage, or cease to fulfill marital duties . .
. . . **He just said spouses aren’t to divorce or withhold their bodies**

So what does he mean?

We hold our lives... our marriages... loosely b/c of how tightly we hold X’s return

What does that mean?

Work through Paul’s examples . . .

If we deal w/ the world (of politics) . . . we remember the best/worst are fleeting
. . . the best candidate is not a messiah; the worst can only do what God wants

If we acquire worldly goods . . . we realize not one of them is permanent.

If we enjoy success ... we rejoice ... but not w/o knowing that others still grieve . .

If we weep . . . we do so knowing one day every tear will be wiped away and all things will be made new . . . JRR Tolkien: **everything sad will become untrue**

So everything is relativized by the coming of Christ . . .

/∴ If we marry . . . we don't conceive of it the way modern movies do

. . . As the ultimate climax of human existence.

Neither do we think of marriage the way I did when I first became a Xian

As a young believer . . . I feared the return of Christ . . . or at least I hoped that it wouldn't happen until I was married.

But that means clinging to the imitation over the real thing.

Sure a coupon for a free meal at Ruth's Chris is nice,
But how much better sitting down with friends and ordering a Filet Mignon

Our marriages are momentary shadows of the eternal reality.

In our wedding vows we testify to the shortness of marriage: Till death do us part!

It's right there . . . if you take time to consider:

You are committing to part . . . from the one you love.
To part and go to Jesus who is your ultimate love.

Indeed, Paul's words reminds us not to put too much stock in marriage.

Make no mistake . . . marriage is a gift. But it is not the GIFT.
God is the Giver of Marriage . . . and he is the GIFT

For **some** of you . . . he may give decades of marriage to prepare you for himself . . .
for **others** . . . years of singleness . . .
and **still others** . . . seasons of marriage mixed with singleness . . .
. . . **all with the eternal aim of widening your heart to him!**

If you he did that . . . would you object??
No . . . not if you truly love Christ.

It's this heaven-ward hope that Paul brings to focus . . .

And he does so . . . so those who are single realize . . . they are not missing out!
. . . and those who are married would remember to seek X first!

Which brings us to the third picture . . . what I'll call the mission of marriage.

The Mission of Marriage (v. 32 – 35)

You may recognize this point shares the same title as our upcoming **Equip Conference**.

In Sept we're going to consider how marriage & EV work together and strengthen OA

But in fact, we might say the same thing about singleness . . .

. . . For the mission of making disciples . . . is the same whether you're M / S

. . . Being fruitful + multiplying isn't something the Bible restricts to married couples

. . . Oh yes . . . marriage is the place where God designs children to be born

. . . But in God's plan of salvation . . . fruitfulness isn't restricted to childbirth

Fruit that lasts = eternal fruit doesn't come from the first birth . . . but the second birth

Since everyone needs to be born again . . . everyone – S / M – is called make Ds

IOW . . . whether you are married or single, you're called to be fruitful & multiply

Do you see what I'm saying? **If not . . . come join us in September**

For now . . . I want you to see that the mission of marriage comes under this greater commission to make disciples

Yet Marriage also comes against this calling . . . as our devotion to God is divided by the devotion required in marriage.

Look at verse 32 . . . **I want you to be free from anxieties**

This negative statement is complemented in v. 35 . . . **I say this . . .**

In between Paul makes 2 contrasts – married/unmarried M; married/unmarried W

READ

Paul's point is not to categorically deny marriage . . . but to help singles to see that the freedom you now have to know God and make him known . . .

It will be divided!

In this way . . . the picture shows a godly married couple pulled in two directions.

Pulled toward God + Pulled toward each other.

The wife + mother of small children doesn't get to have the extended quiet times like she once did. **Her devotions are divided.**

The ministry-minded husband must first focus his attention on his wife & his own children . . . **His devotion is divided.**

Now . . . to be sure . . . these "divisions" aren't bad. They are good.

But they are restrictions. Limitations. Distractions in one's devotion.

And thus Paul says that the married are OF NECESSITY divided.

In contrast, singles are able to devote themselves wholly to God without distraction.

Well . . . Paul was writing before the advent of video games, smart phones, Tinder.

We must not be mastered by those either!

But with regards to marriage . . . he writes in v. 35 for this purpose:

"to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord."

This more than anything else . . . shows Paul's heart.

He commends singleness b/c he wants everyone to press further into the Lord.

He applauds singles because he sees the massive lost-ness of the world . . . and he believes some of you may be called you in unique ways of undivided service.

But again . . .

. . . his counsel is not absolute as his final instructions in verses 36 – 40 indicate

The Measurements of Marriage (v. 36 – 40)

The last picture is simply the scales you must weigh before entering marriage.

In vv 36 – 38, Paul lays out the options for young men considering marriage.

In vv 39 – 40, he finishes with counsel for widows who are considering remarriage.

To young men . . . he says . . . **make up your mind . . . if passion leads you, marry your betrothed, or if you are self-controlled, don't**

You can see how subjective his counsel is. It requires a soul-searching, prayer, and insight into one's calling.

I might add . . . that b/c our hearts are easily deceived . . . anyone considering marriage would be immensely helped by godly peers and parents.

How tragic it is when someone tries to go it alone and ends up making a decision that has lifelong impact . . .

By contrast, what joy it is when a man and woman move towards marriage accompanied by family and friends cheering them on.

In truth, for those who feel like they don't have such counselors . . . Look to whom Paul is writing – **He speaking to the local church**

The local church is the family for those who don't have a godly family (or any fam)

The same goes for those considering remarriage.

You don't have to go it alone . . .

Paul gives widows freedom to remarry . . . if they desire . . . and if the man is Xian

Again this counsel is non-specific. Like the Prov. it requires reflection and prayer.

Indeed . . . all of these counsels do.

Paul is not giving answers for every contingency. He's giving counsel to singles and marrieds and pressing us all to walk in the wisdom that God has given

Indeed, we cannot glorify God in our bodies and with our vocations without wisdom. And so like James says, we must ask God for wisdom . . .

And then like Paul teaches . . . we must find it in the gospel of Jesus Christ with the help of our Spirit-filled family . . . INVITATION