

1 CORINTHIANS: MOVING FROM THE CARNAL TO THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Part XVII: Apostolic Advice On Marital States For The Unmarried

(1 Corinthians 7:25-40)

I. Introduction

- A. When Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians, not only were his readers surrounded by gross immorality, but the believers were facing imminent persecution, what led to questions from virgins on marital states.
- B. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 answer these questions, and we view them for our application today:

II. Apostolic Advice On Marital States For The Unmarried, 1 Corinthians 7:25-40.

- A. First, Paul gave counsel regarding marital states for virgins who had never been married, 1 Cor. 7:25-38:
 - 1. Though God did not command Paul to write about virgins who had never been married, he claimed that he was accounted by God to be trustworthy to use his apostolic authority to advise them, 1 Corinthians 7:25.
 - 2. Thus, Paul advised that due to the imminent threat of persecution against the Corinthian believers (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 519), it was best for everyone to stay in his current marital status, 1 Cor. 7:26-27. Paul knew that persecution was far more traumatic if one's spouse or children were also persecuted than if he had no family and he was persecuted alone, but that one had to stay in a family if he already had one.
 - 3. Nevertheless, since he had already established that it was better to marry than to burn in lust (1 Cor. 7:9b), Paul conceded that a believer does not sin if he decides he must get married even if he faces imminent persecution, 1 Corinthians 7:28, 26-27. Yet, Paul added that the time was short, that the marital state was temporary in view of eternity, implying one should not get married if he lacked the need, 1 Cor. 7:29-31.
 - 4. Also, celibacy has the practical advantage of enabling one to focus on the Lord and Christian service to a greater degree than were he to marry and need to give some of his attention to his spouse, 1 Cor. 7:32-35.
 - 5. In addition, the culture of ancient Corinth provided that a virgin girl's father determined if she would get married (Ibid., p. 520), so Paul added that if a father of a virgin believed he was making life too hard for her by not giving her away in marriage, he was not sinning by giving her away in marriage, 1 Cor. 7:36.
 - 6. However, if his daughter had the gift of celibacy and could live without burning in lust, her father was right not to give her in marriage, 1 Corinthians 7:37. After all, it was pragmatically better for her if he did not give her away due to the difficult persecution the believers were about to face, 1 Corinthians 7:38, 26.
- B. Paul then turned his attention to the case of Christian widows [and widowers by application], 1 Cor. 7:39-40:
 - 1. Since the death of one's spouse breaks the bond of earthly marriage, a widow [and a widower by application] was free to marry whomever she chose to marry in accord with the custom of the remarriage of widows of that day, providing she married a believer, 1 Corinthians 7:39.
 - 2. This stipulation on a believer's marrying only another believer is implied in 2 Corinthians 6:14 where Paul directed us believers not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. The union of a believer with one who was unsaved was the uniting of one who was positionally righteous with one who was not, the uniting of one who was in the light of God versus one who was in spiritual darkness, the uniting of a believer with an unbeliever that put enormous strain in the spiritual realm on the relationship, 2 Cor. 6:14. Thus, the believer was not to enter into a marital union with an unbeliever.
 - 3. The question may arise as to the remarriage of divorced widows, and it is answered by Paul's 1 Corinthians 7:7:10-11 standard: divorce is not permitted, but if it occurred, the divorced woman was either to remain single or be reconciled to her husband. Thus, **only** if a divorced widow has either been reconciled to her spouse before his death, or if she would desire to do so were the opportunity still available to her could she then be said to be free to remarry another due to the death of her spouse! [Some believers hold that any record of divorce in one who is a widow disqualifies her for remarriage, and I respect their stance.]

Lesson: *The stipulations given to other believers apply to those who have never been wed: (a) celibacy is to be preferred for reasons of devotion to God and Christian service if one has the gift of celibacy. (b) Yet, since it is better to marry than to lust, a virgin believer, man or woman, does not sin if he or she marries. (c) Christian widows are free from their marital bond by the death of their spouse, and are thus free to remarry whom they wish providing they marry a believer. (d) A widow who was divorced can remarry if she had been reconciled to her spouse or if she would want to be reconciled to him where he yet alive, and if she does not have the gift of celibacy.*

Application: *May those who have never been married, or widows [and widowers] who could remarry, stay celibate if they have the gift of celibacy, but get married if they need to be married due to their lack of the gift of celibacy.*