

ADVENTURE NOT AGONY**1 Corinthians 7:25-40****(Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40)**

INTRO: Paul is giving some final touches to his discussion of marriage and relationships as he attempts to address some questions sent to him by the Corinthian Church. As I've pointed out before, his answers can almost seem random as he darts down some side trails here and there, but he's got a method to his madness. He suffers what all preachers struggle with, in staying on topic as other important points present themselves as he teaches. He's not being ADD, his mind is just full and he is bound and determined to help the new believers in Corinth to walk in faithfulness. So, while the passage I just read may have fit at the beginning of Chapter 7, or even Chapter 6, it suffices as his concluding remarks on the subject.

He is saying, in so many words, walking with Jesus is an adventure and not agony so don't make it what it's not. The Corinthians were going to one extreme or the other. Some were thinking that God's grace allowed to do anything they wanted, which was presenting itself in some depraved sexual practices and beliefs. Others were thinking their faith required them to insulate themselves by denying themselves which was presenting itself in denial of proper and normal conjugal relations in marriage.

Also, it still being relatively early in Paul's ministry when he was still of a mind that Christ's return for his Church was imminent. So his teaching on marriage is influenced by a firm belief that Christ followers are to make the best of the time remaining to them for the purpose of the kingdom. As I pointed out before, Paul's theology of marriage is still in its formative stage and by the time he writes to Ephesians almost 10 years later, marriage has elevated to the picture of Christ and his Bride, the Church.

Nevertheless, he has good words for us to apply here, for life, for marriage, and for relationships. One that shows itself right ways is . . .

Mind the times and honor responsibility

- There is no extant letter with the questions Paul was addressing, but it would seem he had been asked if marriage is less desirable for Christ Followers than celibacy, than should parents keep their unmarried children from marriage? Paul replies that he has nothing directly from the Lord on it, but his opinion, as a servant of God is that everyone should stay as they are. It's just less complicated that way. He has previously addressed this, but he's saying it again.
- BUT – he also wants the Corinthians to know unequivocally that it is not sinful to marry. Contrary to how it sounds, celibacy is not an elevated state. Marriage is not a step down. However, in view of the times, and considering that Jesus could return momentarily, make your decisions accordingly.
- It may have been that men who were engaged to young women were thinking twice about marriage and leaving their brides at the altar. This is wrong too. The responsible thing is to carry through on your promises. The very word "betrothed" means to be promised in marriage and one does not break promises. To walk away from a marriage may even leave a bride humiliated and even destitute. Paul is saying keep your promises, both to God and to one another.
- Besides, marriage is a good thing. I love doing weddings. The preparation time I get with a couple as their wedding day approaches is a sacred responsibility. I get to speak into their lives about what Biblical marriage is in a world where commitment is as disposable a Dixie cups. I do not take it lightly. Another perk and privilege of officiating weddings is that I get to speak to a larger audience about what marriage is at the actually wedding ceremony. If you come to me to do your wedding, you will find out that I do not charge a fee and expect no remuneration other than no less than four sessions of counselling and a ceremony that is from a Biblical viewpoint with an unapologetically Christian perspective. If they agree, we're in business. One of the first things I say as I open the ceremony is this: *"Let all who enter it know that marriage is a sacred and joyous covenant, a way of life ordained of God from the beginning of his creation. Marriage is also compared by the apostle Paul to the mystical union between Christ and his church. Therefore, it should not be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, considering the purposes for which it was ordained."* Paul is telling the Corinthians here that if they do choose to marry they should enter into that sacred relationship reverently and with their whole heart. That is the responsible thing to do, especially in view of the times we're in.
- Nevertheless, Paul makes the case to the Corinthians to . . .

Free yourself of complications

- I was discussing mechanical repairs and how they can nickel and dime a car owner toward bankruptcy this past week and I was reminded how when at age 16 I bought my first car for a whopping \$300, as my dad told me “*A car is a liability and NOT an investment.*” Back then I thought he was being a wet-blanket, but a million times since that day in 1973, I have reflected on the incredible truth of Daddy’s words. I think of how much money I’ve spent on cars and car repairs and know I could have a private island in the South Pacific. Cars are a convenience, kinda. They probably are even a necessity. But WOW, do they add complication to our lives.
- Well, that probably was a bad analogy for marriage, especially since Paul never encountered a single automobile in any one of his missionary journeys, but it can be convenient and even a necessity. After all, didn’t God tell Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply? (Genesis 1:28). And God said from the beginning that it’s not good for human beings to be alone and so he made both sexes for companionship and for expanding the race. As I said, it’s a good thing. We all know that. Marriage is a good thing as you cultivate it and nourish it, which is what you must do because it is what you vowed before God to do and in order for it to flourish. It’s not a good thing if you do not.
- This was no doubt in Paul’s mind as he points out that marriage complicates things. It necessarily means you no longer are thinking for one. You now have a spouse to consider, and, sooner or later, in almost all cases, you have even more distractions in the form of children. Paul makes sure the Corinthians understand that he doesn’t see this as a bad thing – it’s just complications that can pull us away from what is our first love. Once again, he is thinking the Church is on the cusp of the return of Christ. And with that in mind, he suggests, it’s not a mandate, to live in *undivided devotion to the Lord*. 1 Corinthians 7:35.
- The important things is . . .

Do the right thing

- Be honorable. Keep your commitments. If you are promised to another person in marriage, don’t back out of it. When you are married be devoted to one another even as you are devoted to God. Keep your commitments to God and to the church. Be people of integrity.
- Take the path that enables you best to carry out the will of God. For some that may be singleness and for most it will be marriage. God will enable you to be faithful by his Holy Spirit.
- Paul finishes out his discussion with advice for widows. Apparently they were concerned they had to remain single, which in that day and age meant no companionship, but more so, financial hardship. He frees them up to remarry, but only to another Christ Follower. This is the only way regardless. Christ Followers must marry Christ Followers.
 - Young people, find a Christ Following mate. Head the heartache off at the pass. I can’t remember a time when I didn’t want to be married. From my earliest childhood I saw a healthy marriage in my parents and assumed I would have that and wanted that for myself. As I matured and came to the age when, in those days, it was “time” to get married, I’m sad to say I wasn’t necessarily looking for a Christian girl. In typical fashion I had more physical attributes in mind and spiritual was down the list. Fortunately the girl who caught my eye and then captured my heart was and is an amazing Christ Follower. The last 40 years may have been difficult if not impossible had I not had someone who has shared my faith in Christ and the glue of commitment. Marriage is hard, but it’s good. Marriage is harder without Jesus.

Conclusion: The point in this passage is, in William Barclay’s words, “*Don’t make an agony of your religion.*” As Christ Followers we are called to the Great Commission. We are called to live our faith first and foremost. As we live our faith it’s important we don’t make it more difficult than it is and too often the layers we add on to our lives make it complicated. Walking with Jesus is an adventure, don’t make it an agony. If God calls you to marriage, as he does most of us, make it an adventure rather than an agony by living faithfully and unselfishly all the while serving Christ. If God calls you to singleness, as he does a few, particularly gifted people, make it an adventure and not an agony. The point is, don’t go where God has not called you. Walking with Christ is to be a joy and not a chore. An adventure not agony. Amen.