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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS
 #19

MARRIAGE AND SINGLENESS
 [PART 2]
 1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-40

INTRODUCTION

Today we will conclude studying this passage on marriage. Last week, we looked at general principles concerning marriage and singleness (7:1-6). We also examined Paul's specific instructions to married couples (7:7-16). In our passage for today, Paul will continue speaking to the issues of marriage and singleness. He does this in two sections within the remaining portion of this chapter. In verses 17-24, Paul advises the Corinthians to be content in whatever state in which God has called them to live. In verses 25-40, Paul directly addresses the unmarried and he instructs them how they are to live as followers of Jesus.

1. OBEY JESUS IN YOUR PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES (7:17-24)

The key principle which Paul applies to all the churches (v17) is *Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called* (v20). Paul teaches us that we must learn to obey Jesus in our present circumstances whatever they may be. Paul makes his point by observing two circumstances in which many of the Corinthians found themselves: circumcision and slavery.

Regarding circumcision, Paul's point is whether one is a Jew (circumcised) or a Gentile (uncircumcised), he is to be obedient to Jesus and content where God has placed him (vv18-20). Regarding slavery, Paul's point is whether one is a slave or freedman, he *is Christ's slave* (v22); therefore, he is free to obey Jesus. Paul does add that if such a man can lawfully obtain his freedom, he should do this (v21). He should do this because the Gospel works for our freedom from all forms of slavery (v23): slavery to sin and slavery to men. But while one was enslaved, he was to obey Jesus and if he became free, he was to obey Jesus.

A few important teachings leap out at us from this text: (1) It is our loving God who sovereignly assigns each of us to our present circumstances (v17). This is not anything like fate. (2) The call of God comes to us in various circumstances, none of which should hinder us from responding to that call. We should not spend time longing for other circumstances. (3) Obedience is what matters (v19); circumstances mean little. So if circumstances change, fine. If they do not change, fine. God still requires obedience.

2. SINGLENESS ALLOWS FOR UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES TO OBEY JESUS, BUT MARRIAGE IS NOT A SIN (7:25-40)

Paul now addresses the single believers in Corinth and he applies the principle which he just articulated; *Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called* (v24).

(2.1) Singleness has definite advantages (vv25-28)

Paul begins by explaining that Jesus never directly taught on this matter, yet Paul's words are trustworthy (v25). Paul has clarified that both marriage and singleness are circumstances which God will bless. One is not more spiritual than the other and both come with their own set of difficulties. But in their present condition, Paul finds singleness to be preferable for the Corinthians who have never been married, but are now considering marriage [possibly already engaged/betrothed]. This is partly due to *the present distress* (v26). It's difficult to know what present crisis Paul referred to, but it is significant enough for the Apostle to caution the Corinthians regarding marriage. Nevertheless, Paul speaks to those already engaged and advises them to go through with their contractual obligations (v27). And to those not contractually bound, they should not seek to become engaged or married at that time. But if one marries, he has committed no sin (v28). Paul simply attempts to simplify things for them and this is the primary advantage of singleness: simplicity.

(2.2) Specific reasons for remaining single (vv29-35)

Paul offers a couple of specific reasons for remaining single. First, marriage is a temporary state because it will pass away with this age (vv29-31). Because this world is passing away, we need not become too attached to it. Perhaps remaining single enables a person to better do this. His point is no present condition in which we find ourselves determines our entire existence. What determines our existence is our relationship to Jesus. Therefore, our greatest concerns should not be centered on what is passing away, but what remains.

Secondly, marriage is filled with various concerns that divide our interests and drain our energies making it more difficult to freely obey Jesus (vv32-35). In other words, for marriage to work as God intended, a husband must try to please his wife and a wife must strive to please her husband. Things get complicated pretty quickly. Paul knows this and he does not want to restrain us from following our desires, but he does want *to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord*.

(2.3) Marriage is not a sin (vv36-40)

Finally, Paul emphasizes that marriage is not a sin. For instance, if a father had made a vow forbidding his daughter from marrying and now, in light of Paul's teaching, he realized he was acting *unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter*, then he does not sin to let her marry (v36). Neither does he sin if he continues with his vow (vv37-38).

Paul concludes with a reminder that marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life. When a spouse dies, the living spouse is free to remarry, but he or she can only marry another believer (v39).

CONCLUSION

Hopefully, many of our own questions about marriage and singleness have been answered by the Scriptures. But let us remember, *the time has been shortened* (v29) and *the form of this world is passing away* (v31). Marriage and singleness are not our ultimate concerns. Your wife or husband or fiancé is not God. Jesus is God and He must be our ultimate concern. So receive the necessary grace to obey Him in whatever circumstance you face.