

1 CORINTHIANS 7:30

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Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 7. In verses 1–24 Paul was focused on the theme of marriage. Then in verses 25–40 he switched to the related topic of virgins and more specifically female virgins. In verse 25 he started by saying that he had no command from the Lord about virgins. In other words, Jesus never taught specifically about virgins during his earthly ministry. But Paul wanted to give us his inspired opinion about this issue. So in verse 26 he said that it's good for a man to remain single because of the present distress. Now we can't be certain exactly what distress he was talking about. But it seems likely that he was referring to a severe famine based on extrabiblical evidence about grain shortages in the Roman Empire around that time.

So Paul's advice here was based on this difficult situation that the people were experiencing. But then in verse 27 he gave some commands about this matter. He told those who were bound to a wife not to seek to be released. And he told those who were released from a wife not to seek a wife. Now at first glance it seems that Paul was telling married men not to get divorced and divorced men not to get married. But this view doesn't fit the context, because Paul was focused on virgins in this section. So it's more likely that he was talking about engagement here. During biblical times engaged people were viewed as though they were already married. They had the status of marriage without the privileges of marriage. And if they wanted to terminate the engagement, they needed to get a divorce.

So the subject of engagement makes good sense in verse 27, because it fits perfectly with the theme of virgins. But why did Paul give commands in this verse after he said in verse 25 that he was just giving his opinion? I think the answer must be that he was not giving normal commands in verse 27. Instead he was just giving strongly-worded advice. And this interpretation is confirmed in the next verse. In verse 28 Paul said, "However, if you do get married, you have not sinned, and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But such people will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you." So in this verse Paul gave some important clarification about what he just wrote. He was basically saying that there's nothing wrong with disobeying his commands in verse 27. Unmarried men don't have to stay single; they can get married without sinning. And Paul said the same thing about single women as well.

But at the end of verse 28 he returned to his opinion about staying single, and he gave people a reason to follow his advice. He said that married people will have trouble in this life. But the Greek word for life more literally means "flesh," and so Paul was referring more specifically to trouble that we experience in our body. He was probably still talking about the severe famine that he hinted at in verse 26. So Paul was basically saying that it's harder to survive a famine when you're married compared to when you're single.

And that's because married people normally would have had a fair number of children back in those days. It's a lot easier to feed yourself than to feed a whole family with lots of kids! So Paul recommended that single people stay unmarried because he wanted to spare them from needless hardship during that difficult time.

Then in verse 29 Paul began a new paragraph in this section, and it runs through the end of verse 31. We started it last week, and today we'll make a little more progress. Look at what Paul wrote in verses 29–31: “This is what I mean, brothers and sisters: The time is limited, so from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they didn't own anything, and those who use the world as though they did not make full use of it. For this world in its current form is passing away.” Notice that Paul started verse 29 with the phrase “this is what I mean.” So it seems that Paul was explaining what he talked about in the previous verses. But a more literal translation here is the phrase “and I say this,” which is found in the NET Bible. So Paul was just adding a new thought to his previous discussion. He was giving another argument for his opinion that it's good for single people to remain unmarried.

And Paul's argument here was simply that “the time is limited.” The Legacy Standard Bible and the New American Standard Bible say that “the time has been shortened.” So the time was shortened at some point in the past, and we're not told who did it. But I think it's reasonable to conclude that God was the one who shortened the time. But what time was Paul talking about here? Well, I think we can find a clue at the end of verse 31. There Paul said that “this world in its current form is passing away.” We'll cover this statement in more detail next week, but it seems that Paul was talking about the future time when the heavens and the earth will be destroyed.

So in verse 29 I believe that Paul was talking about the time remaining until the destruction of the heavens and the earth. Now Paul wasn't implying that Jesus was going to return immediately. He was just saying that once Jesus ascended to heaven, he could return at any moment and launch the events that lead to the destruction of the heavens and the earth. So the first coming of Jesus brought us one big step closer to the end of the world. And because this time has been shortened, there are some ramifications for how we live right now during the church age. In verse 29 Paul stressed this point by using the phrase “so from now on.” And then he made five parallel statements that show how this shortened time has an impact on our lives. The first one is in verse 29, and we looked at it last week. Paul said that “from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none.”

Now this statement seems pretty clear on the surface. Paul was basically saying that married men should live as though they aren't married. Now obviously this doesn't mean that married men should get divorced or that they should abstain from sexual relations with their wives. Paul already dealt with those issues very clearly in the beginning of this chapter. So I think it's safe to say that Paul was using hyperbole in verse 29. In other words, he was exaggerating to make a point. And his point is that we should not find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in marriage. In fact, marriage itself points us to what really matters. It's a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. So we should find our ultimate joy and satisfaction in our relationship with the Lord. Nothing should matter more to us than pleasing him.

You see, marriage was never intended to be something that lasts forever. In Mark 12:25 Jesus said that when people “rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven.” So human marriage is temporary and ends at death. Then our temporary marriages will be replaced by our permanent marriage to Jesus. So the point here is that believers who are single should not become consumed with getting married. Now we know that there’s nothing inherently wrong with getting married. But being single or married is not central to our identity as Christians. Our highest priority should be on serving the Lord regardless of our marital status. We need to make sure that we’re living in obedience to him, whether we’re single or married.

Now let’s move on to verse 30. We’re ready to cover some new material. Let’s look at the second and third statements about how the shortened time has an impact on our lives. These two statements form a pair, and so we’ll look at them together. Paul said, “Those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice.” So it sounds like Paul was saying that those who weep should stop weeping and that those who rejoice should stop rejoicing. In other words, Paul apparently didn’t want us to experience any joy or sorrow at all. Perhaps he just wanted us to live our lives without experiencing any emotion at all.

But of course we know from the rest of Scripture that this conclusion can’t possibly be true. We can even see this issue addressed in the Old Testament. In Ecclesiastes 3:4 Solomon said that there’s “a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.” So there are appropriate times to weep and appropriate times to rejoice. We don’t need to completely avoid one or both of them. And Paul confirmed this conclusion in Romans 12:15, where he told us to “rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.” So we should empathize with our fellow Christians, whether they’re going through good times or bad times. The unity in the body of Christ should be so strong that “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” That’s what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:26.

And he certainly led by example and showed us that it’s okay to weep and to rejoice. Listen to what he said in Romans 9:1–3: “I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience testifies to me through the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the benefit of my brothers and sisters, my own flesh and blood.” So Paul experienced great sorrow over the fact that most of his fellow Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. But sometimes Paul experienced great joy as well. In Philippians 4:10 he said, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me but lacked the opportunity to show it.” So when the believers in Philippi supported Paul financially, it brought him great joy.

But Paul wasn’t the only person in Scripture who experienced both sorrow and joy. Jesus himself was an example for us in both of these areas. After his friend Lazarus died in John 11, we’re told very simply in verse 35 that “Jesus wept.” It’s one of the shortest verses in the Bible, but it clearly communicates that there’s nothing wrong with weeping on certain occasions. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Paul talked about the issue of grieving when our fellow believers die. But he didn’t say that we shouldn’t grieve at all when that

happens. Instead he said that we shouldn't grieve like those who have no hope. We know that they're going to rise from the dead and that we'll be reunited with them someday.

But Jesus didn't just show us that it's okay to weep at times. He also showed us that it's okay to rejoice. Listen to what Luke 10:21 says about him: "At that time he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, because that was your good pleasure.'" So in this verse Jesus was basically rejoicing at God's sovereignty in salvation. In fact, Scripture teaches us that God is sovereign over everything that happens. And so we should rejoice in the Lord at all times. Paul said in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

So when Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:30 that those who weep should be as though they didn't weep and that those who rejoice should be as though they didn't rejoice, he wasn't saying that there's anything inherently wrong with weeping and rejoicing. Once again he was using hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point, just like he did in verse 29 with marriage. And I think his point here was that our sorrow and our joy should be different as believers compared to unbelievers. We need to live in light of the fact that Jesus could come back at any moment. As we already saw, we should weep with those who weep, but we shouldn't weep like those who have no hope. And we should rejoice with those who rejoice, but ultimately we should find our joy in the Lord and what he has done for us. Listen to what Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 10:20: "Don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

You know, people find joy in all sorts of things, like getting a raise at work or going on a vacation or hanging out with friends or getting married. And as Christians we can find joy in those things as well. In fact, we can find joy in anything that doesn't violate God's moral will for our lives. But our joy should transcend all these earthly things. So the ultimate reason we should rejoice in marriage is that it's a good gift from God. But singleness is also a good gift from God, and so there's no reason to weep over being unmarried. As Christians it doesn't really matter whether we're single or married. We should rejoice in the Lord regardless of our marital status.

And Scripture teaches that one day we're not going to experience any more sorrow. Jesus said in John 16:20 that when he returns, our sorrow will turn to joy. In Isaiah 65:19 God said, "I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. The sound of weeping and crying will no longer be heard in her." And this prophecy is confirmed for us in Revelation 21:3–4. There John said that he "heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away." So there's nothing inherently wrong with weeping right now, but we should look forward to the day when there will be no more sorrow. We need to live every moment in light of Christ's imminent return.

Now let's look at the fourth statement in 1 Corinthians 7:29–31 about how the shortened time has an impact on our lives. At the end of verse 30 Paul said that "those who buy [should be] as though they didn't

own anything.” The Greek word for buy is used 30 times in the New Testament, but Paul wrote only three of them. All of them are found in this letter, and we’ve already seen the first two. In chapter 6 and verse 20 Paul said that “you were bought at a price.” Then in chapter 7 and verse 23 he said exactly the same thing. So in these two verses Paul was talking about the purchase of people. He was referring to the fact that Jesus bought us when he saved us from our sins. When he died on the cross and shed his blood, he paid the price for us to be set free from slavery to sin and become his slaves. This truth is called the doctrine of redemption.

But here in chapter 7 and verse 30 Paul was using the Greek word for buy literally with the idea of acquiring things in exchange for money. And this meaning is very common in the Gospels. For example, in Mark 6 Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people. But in verse 36 the disciples asked Jesus to “send them away so that they can go into the surrounding countryside and villages to buy themselves something to eat.” Then in Mark 16 after Jesus died and was buried, we see in verse 1 that “when the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they could go and anoint him.” So in both of these verses the Greek word for buy is being used literally.

And of course we’re very familiar with the concept of buying something. The process has certainly changed over time, but the concept is still the same. Back in those days money was made out of metal, and we still use coins a little bit today. But we mostly use paper or plastic now. We either pay with cash or use a credit or debit card to buy things. And with credit and debit cards the payments are made electronically. But whether we use credit, debit, cash, or coins, we’re still acquiring something in exchange for money. It could be food, gas, clothes, or something less essential. But in 1 Corinthians 7:30 Paul said that those who buy should be as though they didn’t own anything.

The Greek word for own is used 17 times in the New Testament, and Paul wrote 10 of them. And this Greek word basically means “to hold on to something.” Now sometimes it has the idea of holding something at bay. For example, in Romans 1:18 Paul said that “God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” There our Greek word is translated with the word “suppress.” Paul was saying that unbelievers hold the truth at bay and try to keep it from having an effect on their lives. But usually this Greek word has the idea of holding on to something or clinging to it. That’s how Paul used this word in the two other places where it’s found here in 1 Corinthians. In chapter 11 and verse 2 Paul said, “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” Then in chapter 15 and verse 2 Paul talked about the need to hold to the message that he preached. So in both of those verses he was talking about holding or clinging to the truth.

But in chapter 7 and verse 30 Paul was talking about holding on to possessions. He said that those who buy should be as though they didn’t own or possess anything. So it sounds like he was saying that we should just get rid of all our possessions. And Jesus did in fact tell someone to do that on one occasion. In Mark 10 a man asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus answered in a surprising way: he quoted some of the Ten Commandments to the man. But he wasn’t saying that we can be saved by obeying God’s commands. Instead he was trying to help the man see that he was a sinner. But

the man responded by saying that he had obeyed all those commands. Instead of admitting that he was a sinner, he clung to his self-righteousness.

So Jesus upped the ante and gave him a few more commands. Verse 21 says, “Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’” So Jesus gave this man another test, and this time he went after the man’s wallet. He checked to see if the man was willing to let go of his possessions. And the next verse shows us that he failed the test. Verse 22 says, “But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.” So does this mean that we can’t be a Christian unless we sell all our possessions? That seems to be what Jesus was teaching here, and it also seems to be what Paul was teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:30.

But that view does not fit with the rest of Scripture. We need to take into account what Paul himself taught about being rich elsewhere. In 1 Timothy 6 he talked a lot about money, and in verses 17–19 he told Timothy to give some instructions to believers who were rich. Look at what Paul wrote in these verses: “Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.”

So notice what Paul did not say in these verses. He did not tell rich believers that they needed to get rid of all their possessions. He did tell them to be generous and willing to share, but he never said that they had to share everything. In fact, he said that God richly provides us with all things to enjoy. So there’s nothing wrong with enjoying our wealth if God has made us rich. The problem is not with being rich but with wanting to be rich. In 1 Timothy 6:9 Paul said that “those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction.” Then in verse 10 Paul said that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” So money itself is not the problem here. It’s the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil.

So in 1 Corinthians 7:30 when Paul said that those who buy should be as though they didn’t own anything, he wasn’t saying that all believers should get rid of their wealth and possessions. Once again he was using hyperbole or exaggeration to make a point, just like he did in verse 29 with marriage and earlier in verse 30 with weeping and rejoicing. So the point here is that we shouldn’t get consumed with obtaining money and possessions. Our lives should not be focused on money but on the Lord. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus said that “No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

You know, Jesus told a parable in Luke 14 that fits perfectly here. Listen to what he said in verses 16–24: “A man was giving a large banquet and invited many. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who were invited, ‘Come, because everything is now ready.’ But without exception they all began to make excuses. The first one said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. I ask

you to excuse me.' Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.' And another said, 'I just got married, and therefore I'm unable to come.' So the servant came back and reported these things to his master. Then in anger, the master of the house told his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame.' 'Master,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, and there's still room.' Then the master told the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, not one of those people who were invited will enjoy my banquet.'"

Now don't miss the point of this parable. Jesus wasn't saying that it's wrong to buy a field or to buy oxen or to get married. The problem is when those things are more important to us than God. These people in the parable were too busy with those things to attend the banquet that they were invited to. And this is a danger that we need to watch out for today as well. There's nothing wrong with getting married. But single people should not get consumed with the desire to be married. We can serve the Lord and please him whether we're single or married. And there's nothing wrong with having a job and making money. But we should not get so busy making money and getting stuff that we neglect to store up treasures in heaven. You see, we can't take our money and possessions with us to heaven. So let's use our money wisely so that it can have an eternal impact. Let's close in prayer.