



“I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord” (I Corinthians 7:32).

Ministry of the Unmarried

Central Truth: Unmarried persons can serve God in their single state.

L118. Date: September 1994. **Text:** I Corinthians 7:29-35.

Topic: Home; Marriage.

There was a time in our history when a girl who was not married by the time she reached her late teens or — at the latest — the age of twenty was thought to be an “old maid.” But the days of that assumption are gone. It is increasingly common for young adults not to marry until they have reached their mid-twenties or later; and an increasing number of adults never marry.

Our society has accepted the fact that the unmarried state is not a curse. Neither is it a less-than-ideal lifestyle. God has assigned to each person his place in the marriage relationship. Jesus said there are three reasons why people remain unmarried (Matthew 19:12). (1) Some are born disabled for marriage. (2) Some have been disabled for marriage by other people's acts, such as mutilation. (3) Some have resolved not to marry because they can serve the kingdom of God better as singles.

No one should rush into marriage just for the sake of being no longer single. Each one should keep himself available to God's will. Cultivating friendships with other Christians and refraining from fretting about marriage will open the door to God's will. The important thing is for one to serve God regardless of his marital state.

The apostle Paul was unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of God. In I Corinthians 7:29-35 he sets forth two guidelines for those who are unmarried: (1) keep your priorities right; and (2) keep your interests undivided.

Keep Your Priorities Right (I Corinthians 7:29-31)

What is the first priority in the life of a Christian? Jesus answers, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). One's first priority is living according to the will of God; it is not marriage, a profession, attainments, or other fleeting things that so many pursue. The Bible calls the believer to keep his priorities right; there is no question about what is involved. The unmarried Christian must keep first things first in every aspect of his life.

Time here is brief. “*The time is short*” (verse 29). Since your time here on earth will not last long, your concern must be on things which will endure. Time spent worrying about your marital state, for instance, is wasted. If you marry, it will last but a little while before Jesus comes. If you do not marry, it will be but a short time before you are with Jesus. So do not waste the short time you have here worrying over such things.

Relationships here are temporary. “*It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none*” (verse 29). Time is hastening to an end; eternity will never end. There is no time to waste on temporal things. Those who are married should remain as free to the Lord as possible. Those who rejoice must not waste time on pleasure, neither must those who grieve indulge themselves in it. Do not become too busy with worldly affairs. Look to things that last.

The world order is passing. “*The fashion of this world passeth away*” (verse 31). The person who is wholly committed to God, whether married or unmarried, must not settle for the temporary, for the eternal is too important and too near at hand. The Bible says, “*The world passeth way, and the lust thereof but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*” (I John 2:17). Why, then, is such emphasis placed on what is so temporary? Serve God with all your heart and soul, whether you are married or unmarried.

Only divine things endure. Therefore, keep your eyes on God. If He brings a Christian partner to share your life, rejoice and thank Him. If He does not bring a Christian partner to you, rejoice and thank Him. Keep your attention centered on Him as the Lord of your life. That will keep your priorities right.

Keep Your Interests Undivided (I Corinthians 7:32-35)

Jesus warned, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other*” (Matthew 6:24). No one can give life's best to God when there is

frustration and complaint against God because of marriage or lack of marriage. The lesson text sets out four principles on how to keep centered on God.

Live without fretting. *“I would have you without carefulness”* (verse 32). God does not want a single one of His dear children to be filled with cares, anxieties, and worry. He tells you to *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Philippians 4:6). Anxiety is a sign of a lack of faith. An old proverb says, “When fear comes in the door, faith jumps out of the window.” Accept your station in life and live in peace.

Keep God's affairs first (verses 32, 33). Be concerned about the things that belong to the Lord, how you may please Him. Marriage would limit some people's spiritual service. Paul wrote that he had a right to have a wife the same as did Simon Peter (I Corinthians 9:5). But he chose not to because of the nature of the ministry God had entrusted to him. He was content to remain unmarried because He considered serving God in world evangelism of greater value than his personal desires. On what do you place the greatest value, your way or God's will?

Be holy in body and in spirit (verse 34). The low moral standard of our current society opens the door for the unmarried to live in sin without a social stigma. Therefore, some are living together and sharing marital intimacy without marriage. Others move from one liaison to another. It must not be so with you as a Christian.

Follow Paul's example: *“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway”* (I Corinthians 9:27). It is not easy. The body must be made a slave to the spirit. If you satisfy the passions of the flesh improperly, you will not be approved; instead, you will fail shamefully in the Christian life. Do not surrender even one member of your body as an instrument of sin (Romans 6:12-14). Be holy! Glorify God in your body and in your spirit, for they both belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Be undisturbed by worldly interests (verse 35). Let others think or say what they will. You are beloved of the Lord, whether you are married or unmarried. If He brings a partner to you, it is because He loves you. If He does not bring a partner to you, it is because He loves you. Rest contentedly in His love.

Do not be bound by human customs. Most people marry, and most of them rear children. But that does not mean that you must do so. If God puts a desire for children in your heart but does not give you a partner in marriage, it may be that He intends for you to give your life to helping

children from marriages where they are not appreciated and reared properly. You are not obligated to marry just because others are married.

Live contentedly in your marital state. *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). The Lord is with you; He will never leave you. Be content.

Keep centered on God. *“Attend upon the Lord without distraction”* (verse 35). There are many things which demand attention in daily life. Blessed is the person who can give all his attention to the Lord. Marriage necessitates concern for one's family. It takes time which might otherwise be given to prayer or ministry in the name of the Lord. Give your best to Him all the time.

To be married is not an ideal state. To be unmarried is not an ideal state. Many married people wish they were single. Many single people wish they were married. Invite God to choose your marital situation and be content with what He chooses, even if He changes it through marriage or the death of a spouse. Keep God and His will as the primary thing through all of your life.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why are so many adults unmarried today?
2. Why should the unmarried go slow in entering a marriage?
3. What is required of a person in a “good” marriage?
4. Why should the unmarried cultivate Christian friendships?
5. How can you serve God whatever your marital state is?
6. What are biblical reasons for one to remain unmarried?
7. What are biblical reasons for one to desire to be married?
8. How can a person live without fretting, whether he is married or unmarried?
9. How can you live contentedly whether you are married or not?
10. How can you keep your life centered on God?