

# *Iglesia de Carne*

## Studies in First Corinthians

### Text

First Corinthians 7:25-40

### Topic

Paul suggested that the believers remain in whatever marital situation they were called, but what did that mean to those who were engaged?

### Title

***“To Betroth, or Not to Betroth...  
That is the Question”***

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The longest engagement on record was between Octavio Guillan and Adriana Martinez. They were engaged in 1902 when they were both 15, but they didn't get married until 67 years later, in 1969, at age 82.

Even though there is almost no other information to be found, I think it's a trustworthy fact - appearing in the Guinness Book of Records. I mean, if you can't trust Guinness, who can be trusted?

The specific questions Paul will address in our text involve Christians who are single, and the subset of Christians who are single but engaged. He had earlier established that believers should “remain” in the state in which they were called. Is that what Octavio and Adrianna did???

- Can, or should, the singles pursue engagements?
- Can, or should, the engaged pursue marriage?

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We will get Paul's insightful answers. There is something else I want us to notice. Paul makes a few unusual comments:

- 1Co 7:25 ... I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy.
- 1Co 7:40 ... according to my judgment - and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

One commentator put it this way: "The ultimate appeal is to Christ's mercies, not to His commands.

Within this framework Paul will give his own judgment, which has as its aim not their obedience, but their own good."

**Here is the bottom line: If you give advice in an area where "there is no commandment," be certain your "judgment" is filled with Jesus' "mercies," not your opinions or any legalism.**

Ok... Let's get into it. I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Your Judgment To Christian Singles Needs To Be Full Of Mercy**, and **#2 Your Judgment To Christian Couples Needs To Be Full Of Mercy**.

### **#1 - Your Judgment To Christian Singles Needs To Be Full Of Mercy (v25-35)**

If you're old enough, you remember exactly where you were when you heard that John Kennedy had been assassinated.

Unless you are very young, the terror attack on 9/11 is another day of infamy that you vividly recall.

If you were saved after the age of accountability, you ought to remember exactly where you were, and what you were doing, when you confessed your sin, repented, and received Jesus as your Savior.

You also remember what state you were in when you received the Lord. Specifically, you remember your marital status:

- You may have been married to a believer.

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- You may have been married to a nonbeliever.
- You may have been single.
- You may have been engaged.

Some in Corinth were teaching that marriage was wrong, and to be celibate was right. What to do?

1Co 7:25 Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy *has made* trustworthy.

By “virgins” he meant single Christian women. Obviously his advice to them would profoundly affect the single Christian men.

The Lord had not taught on this subject. Paul was “giv[ing] judgment.” He was applying biblical wisdom.

The mention of “mercy” is precious. It was Paul’s way of saying that his advice was full of sympathy and understanding. It was caring and loving and came from someone who was “made trustworthy” to give counsel.

- Biblical counsel can seem harsh.
- Biblical counsel can be delivered harshly.
- Worldly counsel can masquerade as biblical and be not only harsh, but harmful.

Don’t be in a rush to give advice. Or to receive it, for that matter. Truth is, a believer is their own best counselor - if you are submitted to the Lord and will humble yourself to hear and heed His voice.

1Co 7:26 I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress - that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is:

If you read the account of Paul’s time in Corinth in the Book of Acts, you’ll see that political and physical persecution had broken out against the believers. If you read history you’ll see that within a few years official state persecution would break out against the church under Caesar Nero. In light of that “present distress,” they needed to think soberly about their immediate future on earth.

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We are not (yet) in a state of severe persecution. But “the time is” always “short,” as we look up for the Lord, and so we must carefully weigh out our life’s decisions.

1Co 7:27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

It’s important we read this accurately. You’ve probably noticed that I quote Gordon Fee most every week. Great guy, a scholar who knows the original languages, and is a noted Bible translator, and a solid charismatic commentator. Here is his take on verse twenty-seven from both the original Greek, and the historical context:

Both questions speak directly to the present situation. The clue lies with the word “loosed,” which is found throughout the papyri as a technical term for discharging someone from the obligations of a contract. If it means that here, then he is speaking first to the betrothed:

1. “Are you bound (i.e., engaged and under obligation to) a woman? Then do not seek to break off the obligation.”
2. The second question would then expand the point to include all singles: “Are you free from such obligations? Do not seek a wife.”

Well, there it is. Stay single. No; not exactly. Read on.

1Co 7:28 But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.

Some in Corinth were promoting the idea that you were more spiritual if you remained single and celibate. Paul said that was not true. There was nothing unspiritual or sinful about getting married. You were (and are) free to make the decision whether or not to marry.

Paul himself was unmarried and said that, at least at this time in his life, he had the gift of celibacy. Think how easy it would have been for him to over-emphasize singleness and celibacy.

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We do that, if we are not careful. Not about singleness only, but about all kinds of things. Obviously, we think what we did, or are doing, is spiritual. It can be hard to admit it isn't less spiritual for others to approach things differently.

In Corinth, as a Christian, life was hard, and about to get much worse. "Trouble in this life" is how verse twenty-eight should read. It's not referring to our inner lusts, but rather outward life.

This is merciful pastoral counsel - not a command.

1Co 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short...

The specific counsel Paul gave needs to be understood in the context that this present life and all its institutions - including marriage - are passing away. We are eternal, looking forward to eternity, and should live in the present from a future worldview.

If you knew that tomorrow would be Day One of the Zombie Apocalypse, you would read these next three verses without much confusion:

1Co 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none,  
1Co 7:30 those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess,  
1Co 7:31 and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away.

Marriage... Mourning... Merriment... Materialism... Every aspect of their lives would be affected by the trouble that was coming.

We don't know if such trouble is coming upon us, here in the greatest nation on earth. As citizens of Heaven, we know that this world is passing away, and every area of our lives must be affected by the joy of our salvation, and the hope of our glorification.

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You are in the world. You marry, you sorrow, you rejoice, you buy things, you make use of things in the world. But, as a Christian, you are no longer “of” the world. None of these things should dominate you anymore. You are free to live for the Lord.

Jesus once told a parable in which the excuse of one man as to why he could not accept Christ’s invitation was “I have married a wife.” Marriage and family is no excuse to quit serving the Lord. I’ve seen too many couples who try to ‘save’ their marriages by drawing-back from church and fellowship. It always backfires. If you’re married, and especially if you have kids, serve the Lord together.

You no longer “weep” as others. Whatever pain come your way is to be understood in light of eternity. Sure, we sorrow; but not as those who have no hope.

This mindset affects the way you “rejoice.” There’s nothing wrong with “rejoicing.” Paul writes elsewhere “rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). I am to rejoice at the things I ought to rejoice over - spiritual things, eternal things.

“Those who buy as though they did not possess” tackles the subject of materialism. I must assess and reassess my materialism in light of eternity. Material things deaden spiritual sensitivity. The things money buys are transient and ultimately trivial. One assessment of my materialism is how much (if anything) do I give to the Lord from my material resources?

“Those who use the world as not misusing it” has to do with just how immersed in the world I am compared to my commitments to the Lord.

The “form of this world is passing away.” Life as we know it is going to end. We are spiritual beings and should treat everything in this world accordingly.

1Co 7:32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord - how he may please the Lord.

1Co 7:33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world - how he may please *his* wife.

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1Co 7:34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world - how she may please *her* husband.

Obviously if you get married it adds an additional “care[s]” to your life. That kind of emotional attachment can be exploited by persecutors. Paul would know because he had terrorized families before getting saved:

Ac 8:3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.

Counsel from Paul, who had been on both sides of persecution, should be heard and heeded.

1Co 7:35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

Paul did not “put a leash on you.” He didn’t say you must break your engagement and remain single. He didn’t say you must marry. It was up to you to decide. Decide with the mindset “that you may serve the Lord without distraction.”

Any judgments you make, or advice you give, should emphasize Jesus’ mercies. As I said - People are their own best counselor, helped by Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, and the indwelling Holy Spirit - the Comforter and the Spirit of wisdom.

Point them in the right direction, to counsel themselves.

## **#2 - Your Judgment To Christian Couples Needs To Be Full Of Mercy (v36-40)**

Let’s start with a better translation of verses 36, 37 & 38. It reads like this:

*If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin **he is engaged to**, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has*

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*settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin - this man also does the right thing. So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better (NICNT).*

These verses are sometimes read as applying to fathers and daughters.

**That is not the best reading.** They address a man and a woman who are engaged.

It is from the man's point of view because he was the one who would take the initiative once a decision was reached.

To the engaged, Paul said break it off if you want... Or get married if you want. Neither is more spiritual, but singleness may be "better," in light of the trouble that was only going to increase.

1Co 7:39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

Biological man... Biological woman... Heterosexuals... Monogamous... Till death do they part. If death departs them, and you either are not gifted with celibacy, or you want companionship - marry a believer. A believer with a good record of obedience to Jesus.

1Co 7:40 In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is - and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

Give remaining single a serious chance. Paul said you might find it "happier." But if not, you're free, and encouraged, to remarry a believer who is likewise no longer "bound" to their marriage.

The last sentence may be taken in one of two ways:

1. It is possible that this is a jab at the Corinthians who thought themselves superior to Paul in spiritual wisdom.





2. Or it may simply be a strengthening of his “opinion,” that he is not simply on his own in this matter. He also has the help of the Spirit in making such judgments.

Paul effectively cuts the baby in half, you might say. He lays down wisdom that is pure, peaceable; most of all, merciful. We should always do the same.

“The time is short.” Here are a few other ways of translating that:

- “The appointed time has grown short“ (NRSV).
- “The strategic, epochal period of time has been shortened” (Wuest).
- “The interval has been shortened” (Moffat).
- “The era is limited” (Concordant).

Or, as Dr. Steven Strange said, “We’re in the endgame now.”

After the ascension of Jesus, the church received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter made it clear that we were now in the Last Days - God’s endgame.

Really? Even though it’s been nearly two centuries?

Remember what Peter counseled those who thought the Lord was delaying His coming for us:

2Pe 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

It isn’t meant to be a formula for converting earthly years into heavenly ones. Still, I think it’s OK to say that the 1986 years (or so) from the Day of Pentecost until right now *are less than two days*.

The relationship of Jesus Christ to those He has saved is often compared to a wedding wherein He is the Bridegroom and His church, the bride:

- The apostle Paul wrote, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ.” (Second Corinthians 11:2).

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- He compares the gift of the Holy Spirit to an engagement ring in Ephesians 1:14.
- When we return with Jesus at His Second Coming, an angel says, “Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (Revelation 19:9).

It can seem like the world record for the longest engagement. Especially when you become aware of the stress and suffering of others; or you yourself are hit with tragedy. Remember this:

*It might be today we look into His eyes  
Might be today we see His face*

*Might be today He places His wounded hand on our tear stained face*

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