

## Living for the Day

- 1 Corinthians 7:25-31
- When I was little, around this time of year, I would be almost beside myself with anticipation. I could not wait for the Day to finally arrive. You know which one. My brothers and I would try to be on our best behavior, for one month out of the year, at least, because the Day was coming. We didn't want to lose out on anything that might be under the tree or in our stocking on the Day. So we kept our rooms clean. Kind of. I mean, Mom was happy as long as she didn't open my closet door. You know, my skateboard, which I stuffed in the closet last, could fall from the top shelf right onto her head. But we cleaned a little, and we even asked Mom if she needed help with cleaning the kitchen as she prepared for the big Day. We were like little angels, my brothers and I. We would even strike up a peace accord during the month, and agree not to shoot our bb guns at each other, until after the Day. There was nothing more important than the Day, and that's why, on the Eve of the Day, for one night, we three brothers would sleep in the same bed. It got to be pretty cumbersome when we were 17, 15, and 11. But it was worth it. All because of the Day.
- That is what Paul is writing to the church about in the first century. Change the way you live for the Day that is approaching. The appointed time has grown very short. The present form of this world is passing away. Of course, Paul's concern was not how we prepare for Christmas, but how we live each day, as Shawn has taught us, in light of the day we will leave the earth, and of course, The Day, the Day of the Lord's return. We start our advent season today and we are reminded that the first advent, the coming of Christ as a baby, points us to the second advent, the return of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, when He will take to heaven the church that He died to redeem. That Day. There's no other like it.
- In the middle of Paul's instruction on marriage and singleness and vocations, Paul adds this encouragement to the church about these things against the backdrop of eternity. Let's look at this passage under two headings: Days of Distress, and Day of Deliverance.
- **Days of Distress (vs 25-28)**
- Again we see that Paul is addressing concerns he has received from the church in Corinth. In verse 25, he writes, "Now concerning the betrothed..." This referred to those who were promised to be married, the betrothed (also translated 'virgins'), but had not yet been married, had not yet consummated their vows. There was some "present distress" that prompted the church to write to the apostle. Something was going on in Corinth, or perhaps in the whole Greco-Roman world that made the Christians in Corinth have second thoughts about whether they should allow their sons and daughters to marry. We cannot say with certainty what this distress was, but there are two prevailing arguments. The word for "distress" literally means "to constrict, to bind hard, to compress." It refers to a compelling force, something you are forced to go through, not something you voluntarily choose or that you bring upon yourself through choices you make. Some believe, including FF Bruce, that this refers to great tribulation from persecution. He wrote, "This time would be particularly harassing for those with family responsibilities." Others believe, like Simon Kistemaker, that Paul was referring to a severe famine. He writes, "An inability to supply the daily needs of a family serves as supporting evidence for postponing marriage."
- In either case, whether the distress was persecution or famine or something else, Paul's recommendation was to those who were not married yet to remain unmarried. Marriage is difficult enough in prosperous times, or in places where you can worship freely, but those difficulties are greatly compounded when a man has a wife and children to care for, there is no work and no food, and Christians are being dragged out of their houses. Paul's response is not an "every man and woman for himself" strategy. You know, "Do the best you can to look out for number one, and forget those for whom you are responsible." No! Paul tells the married man, "Do not seek to be free from your wife. She is your responsibility to care for

and protect, as much as you are able to do so.” But he tells the single people, even those engaged to be married, “It is good for you to remain where you are.” Why? He says it in verse 28: “Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.” But, Paul also gives allowance for those who choose to go ahead and get married anyway. “You have not sinned,” he says. This section reminds me of two principles that are clear in Scripture, and bear repeating this morning.

- First, marriage should not be entered into lightly, but with as much clear-eyed understanding as possible. It is the most important choice you will ever make. You didn’t choose God, He chose you. But you will choose your wife or husband for life, and she or he will choose you. Choose carefully, with much prayer, and with guidance from those whom God has placed in your life as having authority over and responsibility for you. Running headlong into marriage without that is a fool’s errand.
- Second, marriage is hard. If you find yourself being disillusioned about your marriage, it’s because you started with an illusion. Paul said it: “Those who marry will have worldly troubles.” It’s hard. Is it worth it? Yes! But the joy you have as a married couple, as you deal with worldly troubles, will depend on how each of you responds to that trouble and to each other when trouble comes. And that will be greatly helped if we keep our eyes on what is most important.
- **Day of Deliverance (vs. 29-31)**
- “The appointed time has grown very short.” This is not an end-of-the-world prediction. Paul is not writing his “65 reasons why the world will end in 65” book. Paul and the other apostles considered all of time since the first advent to be “the last days.” BUT, he is not referring here to the calendar but to the age we live in, anticipating the consummation of God’s kingdom. Simon Kistemaker writes, “Paul is telling the Corinthians to reject the Gentile perspective on time and adopt the view that God’s kingdom has invaded this world and is transforming it...and touches all aspects of human life.”
- This helps us understand the difficult and confusing passage that follows and starts with “From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none.” If you are one of those Christians who don’t know the Bible, this one can get you into trouble. Let’s say your method of daily Bible reading is just to close your eyes, pop open the book, and plop your finger down on the page, while promising the Lord to do whatever the verse tells you to do. “Let those who have wives live as though they had none.” You go and smartly tell your wife that you have to obey the Lord, even when it’s hard. “Sorry, honey, I have to be a man of the Word! I am married to you, but I am going to act as if I have no earthly responsibility for you at all. I am too heavenly minded for that.” You’d be in the same camp as the woman who told her pastor she was going to divorce her husband. When the pastor asked why, she said, “Because the Bible tells me to put off the old man.” (Just a side note, some Christians today know their Bible about as well as some students know history. I like to give an extra credit question on a quiz around Thanksgiving that says, “When the Pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving in 1623, according to William Bradford in his book, “Of Plymouth Plantation,” to whom were the Pilgrims giving thanks?” One student this week answered, “Abraham Lincoln.”)
- This section is written like poetry, where each line is constructed according to same pattern. “Let those who... have wives, mourn, rejoice, buy goods, deal with the world...live as though they... had no wives, were not mourning, were not rejoicing, had no goods, had no dealings with the world.” Paul introduces the poem, if you want to call it that, with these words: “From now on.” From now on, he teaches us, look at the world from an eternal perspective. From now on, live life as though you will be leaving at any moment, to cross the vale into eternity. That does not mean that we leave our wife or our husband, telling our spouse, “Sorry, but we won’t be married in heaven, so I am going to go ahead and move into that reality.” No, it means that you love your wife or your husband, but you do not make marriage the ultimate objective. It is momentary, as Piper writes in his book on marriage. But it is also important and it is to be cherished and worked on and it is God’s will for you who are married to make the most of it without making it the reason why you are here. Kingdom living requires that we live for the King!

- In the same way, it doesn't mean we never mourn, or never rejoice, or never buy things. That's part of life. But they do not define life. We are not to be absorbed in mourning, but in Christ and His promises. We are not to be absorbed in rejoicing, except in the Lord. We are not to be consumed with being a consumer, for that too is temporal. What happens is when we live for those things, even for a good marriage, we lose sight of what is eternal, and our minds are set on earthly things.
- Paul says in verse 31, "For the present form of this world is passing away." The word for form, schema, can be translated, "mask." It was used in the Greek to describe an actor's mask who is on stage pretending to be something he is not. The world system is a mask, it is a pretender, and it promises what it cannot deliver. Everything we have been given is good, but it parades around as if it were ultimate. It is not. The present form of this world is passing away. The Apostle John was certainly familiar with Paul's letter to the Corinthians when he wrote this: "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." -1 John 2:17
- I think the more we live each day in light of that Day, or in light of the day that we will no longer be here on the earth, the better marriage we will have, or the better single person we will be. The sweeter our love, the deeper our peace, the fuller our joy. Even Christmas will be a time of great celebration, without the great letdown we sometimes experience when the last present is opened and the last bit of sweet potato casserole is consumed. Christmas is not the Day. But it brings us one day closer to it!
- Prayer