

Lent Devotional March 17, 2020

Scripture

1 Corinthians 7:26-29a, 32-38

26 I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. 29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; . . . 32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; 33 but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord. 36 If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. 37 But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. 38 So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. William N. Jackson '61, Pastoral Ministry (2017)

A cursory reading of these verses from 1 Corinthians 7 might lead one to think that they merely discuss the contrasts (the pros and cons) between being married and being celibate—which is better or worse? The text is actually, however, a statement about the obvious differences regarding the number of demands, duties, and pressures—or lack of them—attendant to each marital status.

Paul states that it would be easier (and perhaps better) for a single person to fulfill his/her calling without the hindrances and distractions that can come with marriage. But he also says very clearly that marriage is not a sin. In fact later, in Ephesians, he says that marriage is a significant symbol, sign, and example of the perfect relationship between Christ and his bride, the Church.

The crucial point in his letter to the Corinthians is that Paul was certain the return of Christ was imminent; it constituted the “impending crisis” of verse 26. Another translation reads, “the time is short.” So for Paul there was an urgency, an imperative, for the followers of Jesus to be ready imminently—to be prepared by putting all their priorities in place. Whether married or celibate, then, and whatever extra personal responsibilities attended them, the Corinthian Christians’ top priority should be readiness and empowerment by the Spirit as Christ’s faithful, well-prepared, obedient servants.

The message for us here in this Lenten season is to take another opportunity for disciplined worship, study, and prayer to re-enforce our “top priority” to fulfill our role of being dedicated disciples, stewards, and witnesses for the Lord, even as we hear again the haunting echo of Jesus saying to us, “You must be ready [AT ANY TIME], for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you least expect.”

Prayer

Oh Lord, may our relationship with you through our daily discipline and devotion of study and prayer make us ready at any time for all opportunities to fulfill our “top priority” to be your faithful, loyal, and

obedient servants—ones who share your love and grace with all the family, friends, neighbors, and strangers we will encounter today. In the name of Jesus our Savior, amen.