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Reasons for Remaining Single
7: 25-40

Reasons for remaining single DIG: What is Paul's guiding principle in verses 17, 20 and 24? How does he apply this general rule specifically to those who are single? What advice does he give on how to live in view of the "present stress?" How does his advice in this context relate to his teaching in Ephesians 5:21-32? He suggests that singleness is an opportunity they ought to consider? What reasons does he give for that?

REFLECT: Are you living by Paul's guiding principle? How? Whatever the Corinthians crisis was, what relevance does this passage possibly have for us today? What kind of advice would Paul give us today? How has singleness or marriage helped you serve Messiah more effectively? Whether you have never been married, are currently married, divorced, or widowed, what is one way you can show your undivided devotion to the Lord this week?

A single person can serve the Lord with a single-minded devotion.



The principle of contentment is one of the most vital dynamics of joyful living in **Messiah**. An attitude of contentment acknowledges that **ADONAI** has provided me with everything I need for my present fulfillment. Contentment is the result of focusing on everything that we have with gratitude, rather than dwelling upon what

we don't have with resentment. Contented people are thankful people; discontented people tend to be embittered and angry.

The present stress (7:25-27): **Paul** acknowledged that **he** was about to embark upon a subject that Yeshua never addressed. **Now the question about the unmarried: I do not have a command from the Lord, but I offer** some godly **advice as one who by the Lord's mercy is worthy to be trusted (7:25).** At the end of **his** teaching on this matter, however, **Paul** informs **the Corinthians** that **he too has the Spirit of God (7:40)**. Thus, it becomes clear he is **God's** mouthpiece. The problem in this case is that **he** cannot lay down a fixed, universal rule. What should be done depends on individual circumstances.[204]

I suppose that in a time of stress like the present it is good for a person to stay as he is (7:26). What was this **present stress** (Greek: *ananke*)? What is this trouble (Greek: *thlipsis*) in **his** life? **Paul** never uses *ananke* to describe an end-time phenomenon, even though there is plenty of eschatology in **his** letters. **He** uses this word either to describe a compulsion a person is under for a certain type of behavior (for example **Romans 13:5; First Corinthians 9:16; Second Corinthians 9:7; Philemon 14)**, or to denounce some persecution or hardship connected with **his** ministry (for example **Second Corinthians 6:4, 12:10** and **First Thessalonians 3:7)**. Moreover, in general, **Paul** uses *thlipsis* for personal suffering and persecution (for example **Romans 5:3; Second Corinthians 1:4, 6:4; First Thessalonians 1:6, 3:3 and 7)**. Finally, the word **Paul** uses for **present** here generally points to that which is **present** in contrast to what is yet to come (for example **Romans 8:38; First Corinthians 3:22 and Second Thessalonians 2:2)**. Again, what was this **time of stress**?

We know from the book of **Acts** that **Paul** experienced many troubles in **his** ministry. Furthermore, some of **his** churches suffered at the hands of enemies as well (notably the church in **Thessalonica** in **Acts 17:1-9; First Thessalonians 1:6-10** and **3:1-5)**. **Paul** knew that such **pressures** could easily move south to **Corinth**, and **he** was fearful that **they** might. And **he** also knew that during such times, **those** who were **married** would have a much more difficult time emotionally because of family concerns, than **those** who were **single**. Consequently, **Paul** recommended that people remain single. **He** is speaking here with the heart of a pastor, addressing the well-being of **his** flock **(Second Corinthians 11:28-29)**. **That means that if a man has a wife, he should not seek to be free of her; and if he is unmarried, he should not look for a wife (7:27).**[205]

The problems of married life (7:28): Paul recognized that there would be **married** couples in **Corinth** reading **his** letter, and even though **he** demonstrates a strong preference for celibate **singleness**, **he** does **not** look down on the institution of **marriage**. **But if you marry you do not sin, and if a girl marries, she does not sin. It is just that those who get married will have the normal problems of married life, and I would rather spare you (7:28).** Of course, it is **not sinful to marry**. But the sea of **matrimony** is rough, even under the most favorable conditions.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being such a wonderful **Husband**! **For your Maker is your husband – Adonai-Tzva'ot is His Name – the Holy One of Isra'el is your Redeemer. He will be called God of all the earth (Is 54:5). Marriage** relationships are important, but the most loving relationship of all is having **You** as our **husband (2 Cor 11:2).** When we live our lives to please **You** as number one in our lives, it brings such great peace and comfort. Though the world may be swirling out of control and other circumstances and relationships are crashing around us – yet with **You** as our **husband** to whom we are united **(Rom 6:5)**, we can rest in **Your** loving arms and put our problems and trials into **Your** hands. It is so comforting to trust **You**, our **Father** and the one we love as our **husband**, for **You** are always there to help and to guide us. **Since You are my rock and my fortress, You lead me and guide me for Your Name's sake (Ps 31:4). You** are the perfect **husband**. In holy **Yeshua's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Our crises today are **not** exactly the same as the one faced by **the Corinthians**. Ours is a time of moral uncertainty, and that fact is undermining the efforts of many to build godly **marriages**. The failure of so many **marriages**, even within the church, is causing many young people to have doubts about *ever* getting **married**. With this in mind, I can imagine **Paul** writing to your Messianic synagogue or church and saying, "Because of **the present stress** and problems of **the flesh,** I have several bits of **advice**. First, don't **marry** so young but take time to grow up. Second, make sure you **marry** the right person, someone with common interests, common goals, common values, and a common faith in **God**. Third, before you **marry**, be sure you know what **marriage** is, instead of using the pagan concept of 'romantic love,' discover all the richness of **God's** ideals for **marriage**. Fourth, understand that it takes work to make a good **marriage**. The present pagan world will keep on trying to undermine your relationship. Finally, draw from all the resources of your immediate family, and your synagogue or church family for

strengthening your **marriage**."[206]

The passing of the world (7:29-31): What I am saying, brothers, is that there is not much time left (7:29a). When **Paul** uses the word time here, it is not the Greek word for chronological time (*chronos*), but for qualitative **time** or opportunity (*kairos*). It is not so much that **Paul** senses the imminent return of **Messiah** from heaven; rather, **he** knows that in the total time scheme of **God's** history of salvation there is only one event left to occur, and we should live in readiness for that event.[207]

Believers are to have a totally new perspective to **their** relationship to **the world**. This perspective is given in the form of several illustrations. Taken literally, these illustrations become absurdities, **not** to mention contradictory, to what **Paul** has clearly said about **marriage (7:2-6)**, and what **he** will elsewhere say about **rejoicing** and **mourning (Romans 12:15)**. Therefore, these illustrations are **not** to be taken literally; this is hyperbole, pure and simple. The question is, "What is the point of such hyperbole?"

What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them (7:29-31a). These clauses show some similarities with both Stoicism and Jewish apocalyptic. But **Paul** is advocating neither the Stoic's "aloofness" from **the world**, nor the apocalyptist's "escape" from **the world**. What **he** is calling for is a radical new stance toward **the world**. **Messiah's** death, and resurrection have changed things for us. Just as in **Messiah, the slave** is a **free** person, and the **free** person is **a slave**, we do **not** live "detached" from **the world**, but we are totally free from **its** *control*. We live our lives like everyone else – **marrying**, **mourning**, **rejoicing**, **buying**, and **making use of it** – but none of **these** *determines* our lives.[208]

What point is **Paul** making? Using hyperbole, **Paul** is saying that being **married** or **single** is **not** the crucial question. **Buying** things and using them is **not** the most important thing in life. **He** is saying don't get caught up in, or distracted by, the cares and emotions of **this world**; **for this world in its present form is passing away (7:31b).** In **Messiah's** death and resurrection **YHVH** has already determined the course of things, and **this world**, in **its** present form, has already been brought under **God's** judgment. As a result, as far as your life goes, **there is**

not much time left (7:29a). So, get busy doing **the Lord's** work.

The preoccupations of marriage (7:32-35): This section is the heart and soul of **Paul's** reasoning. A **single** person can serve **the Lord** with a **single**-minded devotion. Without a spouse and children to care for, one who is single enjoys a mobility that a **married** person cannot have. Those who are **single** should enjoy to the full the freedom that comes from not having to meet the needs of an immediate family, and should use their freedom to serve **the Lord** without the distraction of a family.[209]

What I want is for you to be free of concern. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's affairs, with how to please the Lord; but the married man concerns himself with the world's affairs, with how to please his wife; and he finds himself split. Likewise, the woman who is no longer married or the girl who has never been married concerns herself with the Lord's affairs, with how to be holy both physically and spiritually; but the married woman concerns herself with the world's affairs, with how to please her husband. Married believers should **not** feel guilty about being **married** and **single believers** should **not** feel guilty about being **single**. **Marriage** does **not** prevent great devotion to **the Lord**, and **singleness** does **not** guarantee it. But **singleness** has fewer hindrances and more advantages. Lest there be any confusion about why **he** was explaining these things to **the Corinthians**, **he** said: **I am telling you this for your own benefit, not to put restrictions on you – I am simply concerned that you live in a proper manner and serve the Lord with undivided devotion (7:32-35).**

The promises of the fathers (7:36-38): Apparently some of the believers in **Corinth** were asking, "Should fathers arrange marriages for **their daughters**, or let them choose who to marry?" During biblical times, marriages were arranged, usually by the father of the bride. It seems that there were some **dads** in the congregation who, out of devotion to **ADONAI**, dedicated **their daughters** to **the Lord's** work as **single** servants. **Their** intentions were commendable. If **their daughters** agreed, so much the better! However, what if **the daughter**, as **she** grew up, did **not** agree to remain **single** for **her** entire life? **She** wanted a family, a husband and children. What was **a father** to do? Having dedicated **her** to **the Lord's** work, should **he** refuse **her** desire and keep **her single**? Or should **he** violate **his** commitment and give **her** away in **marriage**?[210]

If anyone (her father) thinks he is not treating his (unmarried virgin)

daughter properly, and if she is past the flower of her youth (if she is now of marriageable age), or if her passions are too strong (and she really wants to get married), and he feels she ought to marry because **she** didn't possess **the gift** of **singleness (7:7), he should not** feel obligated to **his** previous commitment**. He is not sinning. He should let her get married (7:36). But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind,** that is, does **not** change **his** mind about the promise, **who is under no compulsion** by **the daughter** to change **his** mind; **but has control over his own will (and has a good and pure motive), and is deeply committed (who has made up his mind to keep his virgin daughter unmarried) – this man also does the right thing. So then, he who gives his virgin daughter in marriage does right, but he who does not give her in marriage does better (7:37-38 NIV).** Once again, **Paul** is saying that being **married** or **single** is **not** the crucial question. The main thing is serving **the Lord**.

The permanency of marriage (7:39-40): Marriage is one of the few choices that we make in life for which there is **no** exit strategy except the death of a spouse, over which we have no control; or a divorce, which causes enormous heartache for everyone involved. Given that reality, singleness should be, for some, a viable option. **A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, provided he is a believer in the Lord (7:39).** There is no doubt that **a believer** is to **marry a believer** (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bi – Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**). But must a Jew **marry** a Jew **(Deuteronomy 7:3; Judges 3:6)**? Only if **she wishes**. May a Jewish **believer marry** a Gentile **believer (Ephesians 2:14)**? Only if **she wishes**. **She is free to marry anyone she wishes. A marriage** between Jewish and Gentile **believers** demonstrates to all the unity of Jew and Gentile in **the Body of Messiah**. But if **she** chooses to restrict **her marriage** pool to other Jewish **believers**, **she** testifies to the Jewish community that **she** wants to preserve the Jewish people, and that Messianic Judaism does **not** imply **assimilation** (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Bo – Ezra's Prayer about Intermarriage**).[211]

Just like **Paul's** own celibate singleness, and the value it had for dedicating service to **the Lord, Paul** expresses the same for the widow contemplating remarriage. **However, my advice** would **be** that **she will be happier if she remains unmarried, and in saying this I think I have God's Spirit (7:40).** All this was sound advice, but only advice. Ultimately, when it comes to matters of **singleness**

and **marriage**, each believer is free before **God** to make up his or her own mind as **God** leads them.