

# Day 28: Undivided Devotion

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 7:32-35*

## Devotion

*"I am saying this for your own good...that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."*

**1 Corinthians 7:35**

In today's reading, Paul further explains why he believes singleness to be the better option. He wants the Corinthians to be free of pressures that will distract them from single-hearted devotion to the Lord. His argument is as follows:

- Less anxiety about external things increases undivided devotion to God
- The unmarried person has comparatively fewer external things to be anxious about than the married person
- Therefore, the unmarried person has more opportunity to give undivided devotion to God

While the unmarried person is anxious to please the Lord, the married person is anxious to please the spouse. Although this may seem to be an oversimplification, Paul is not intending to imply that seeking to please one's spouse is inherently negative. He is simply observing that marriage entails demands and responsibilities that ought not to be neglected.

Either way, whether we find ourselves married or single, let verse 35 be our goal – to live in “undivided devotion to the Lord” to the very best of our ability, whilst honouring our God-given commitments and responsibilities.

## Prayer

*Lord, in my present singleness, give me the zeal to take hold of the freedoms that I have to serve You with undivided and wholehearted devotion! Lord, as a married man/woman, may I seek to honour my marital vows by loving my spouse, and together seeking to honour You. Amen.*

# Day 29: A Win-Win Situation

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 7:36-40*

## Devotion

*“So then he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.”*

**1 Corinthians 7:38**

In concluding Paul's thoughts about marriage and singleness, he says that one does well in reaching the decision either to marry or to remain single. But to “do well” in this context is not about reaching some kind of idealistic spiritual height, but rather to make a careful, prayerful decision about what to do. It entails an authentic external examination before God and then making a measured decision that will not detract from service to God. In this case, one's service to God will be sabotaged if one sentences oneself to celibacy only to meet others' expectations – as opposed to doing so because one feels genuinely called by God and equipped by God to do so.

In other words, the one who marries due to compulsion does not sin. Yet the one who does not marry due to his self-control does well. The one who marries does well, but the one who does not marry does even better (v 38). The context reveals why Paul thinks that the one who does not marry does better – it is for purely practical reasons and is not to be treated as a morally superior course. In doing so, Paul refrains from making one expression of the spiritual life binding on all believers, since to do so would lead to elitism which in turn divides a community. Rather, his primary concern is about what is most fitting, most beneficial and most likely to contribute to undistracted devotion to God.

## Prayer

*Lord, keep me from being judgemental in looking down on those whose marital status may be different to my own. Instead, help me to be intentional, prayerful and solely focussed on you as I seek to navigate all of my relationships – but especially those of a romantic nature. In whatever I decide, may you be glorified above all! Amen.*

# Day 30: The Issue of Idol Food

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 8:1-13*

## Devotion

*"Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall."*

1 Corinthians 8:13

Paul introduces the dispute over how to think about food sacrificed to idols by establishing common ground with the Corinthians. As Christians, we know that there is only one true God, and that idols have no divine legitimacy despite their many adherents. This foundational truth forms the bedrock of the twofold argument that he presents in this part of the letter:

1. Christian love must always override knowledge that feeds arrogance. Christian love, far from being 'blind', must be informed by knowledge – but knowledge without love is barren. Love necessitates our consideration not only of our own consciences but also the impact of our actions on our fellow Christian brothers and sisters

2. Christian monotheism defines who the people of God are as distinct from those who worship a plurality of gods or lords. We are to be marked by exclusive loyalty to God. Even a perfunctory or make-believe show of fealty to an idol compromises the loyalty owed only to God and Christ

Whilst the scenario presented to us in this passage may not be directly applicable to the majority of us, the same principles ought to guide us as we navigate similarly contentious issues in our time and culture. May God fill us with love, wisdom and discernment to walk this tightrope carefully!

## Prayer

*Lord, as I navigate the contentious issues of our time, may I be fuelled simultaneously by considerate love for others and undivided loyalty to you. Help me to be counter-cultural in my religious devotion to you and bold in my selflessness towards my Christian brothers and sisters. Amen.*

# Day 31: Free To Love

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 9:1-6*

## Devotion

*"Am I not free? Am I not an apostle...don't we have the right to food and drink?"*

**1 Corinthians 9:1, 4**

In today's passage, Paul is not so much defending his status as an apostle as he is establishing that an apostle has certain rights. These rights are framed in such a way that they tie in with the preceding section of the letter on the issue of food sacrificed to idols. By establishing his high status – as one who witnessed Christ's resurrection and founded the church in Corinth – Paul accentuates the extent of his sacrifice to lower himself socially to win others. It sets up the example he expects them to follow.

Since Paul is limiting himself by refusing to eat something that might cause another to stumble, readers might wonder why someone who is supposedly 'free' would engage in a seemingly degrading and servile act; limiting what he eats for the sake of one who is weak. Later on in chapter 9, Paul emphasises that he voluntarily makes himself a slave to all in his service of Christ. It is precisely his freedom in the Lord that causes him to limit how he uses that freedom. In other words, Paul essentially redefines freedom for the Corinthians in such a way that excludes the pursuit of self-interest, instead making the well-being of the community paramount.

## Prayer

*Lord, thank you for the freedom we have in you. Thank you that because our relationship with you is not founded on law but on grace, we are not dictated by what we have to do but rather by what we now get to do. Help us to use this freedom not for our own interests but for the sake of those you have called us into community with. Amen.*

# Day 32: Compelled

*Today's Reading*

*1 Corinthians 9:7-18*

## Devotion

*"I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"*

1 Corinthians 9:16

Five hundred miles north of Tokyo, in snow country, a modern-day Paul laboured until he burned his life out for Christ. Reverend Matsuda faithfully and diligently pastored his humble-sized flock, whether from the platform on Sundays or around the dinner table during the week.

On some Sundays, however, Reverend Matsuda could not stand at the pulpit, instead delivering the Word of God sitting in a chair in front of the congregation. It turned out, the conditions that he was working under were contributing to his fast-deteriorating health. He was a "tentmaker" – supporting himself, his wife, and three children with a daily job while serving as a pastor. He drove a route around the countryside, selling and sharpening scissors for barber shops and supplying cosmetics and shampoo for beauty salons. Day in, day out, in the heat of summer, in the blizzards of winter, Sunday's sermon took shape as he drove his little van along treacherous mountain roads.

Reverend Matsuda could have pastored a large city church and received an appropriate salary. However, he sensed the call to spread the gospel in rural northern Japan.

This is a picture of what it looks like to be "compelled to preach the gospel" (v 16). Undoubtedly, the way that you will obey this call will look different to Reverend Matsuda, but the call remains the same. What will it mean for your life to be one marked by an insatiable compulsion to preach the gospel?

## Prayer

*Lord Jesus, you made the ultimate sacrifice for us. Help us not to count the cost of living for you. May we be willing to lay down our lives for the people you call us to serve. Amen.*