

Christian Worry

1 Cor 7:32-35

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. One man told a very close friend, "I have a mountain of credit card debt. I've lost my job, my car is being repossessed, and our house is in foreclosure, but I'm not worried about it."
1. "Not worried about it!" exclaimed his friend.
 2. "No. I've hired a professional worrier. He does all my worrying for me, and that way I don't have to worry about it."
 3. "That's fantastic. How much does your professional worrier charge of his services?"
 4. "Fifty thousand dollars a year," replied the first man.
 5. "Fifty thousand dollars a year? Where are you going to get that kind of money?"
 6. "I don't know," came the reply. "That's *his* worry."
- B. There is a very real sense in which we Christians have a professional worrier who will take all our worries and concerns—God himself.
1. Jesus informs us that we're not to be a worrying people: "I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Mt 7:35-34).
 2. God tells us that he is more than willing to take all our worry and concern: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you" (1 Pt 5:6-7).
- C. As true as those words of Scripture are, Paul informs us in this text there is a proper place for worry in the Christian's life.
1. You know that *appropriate* worry has a place in all of our lives.
 - a. If you go to work tomorrow and aren't even the least concerned about your work, how long do you suppose you'll remain in that position?
 - b. If you go to school tomorrow and aren't the least concerned about your grades, what chance are you going to have to get a college degree so that you can provide a meaningful income for your family?
 - c. If you start feeling sick or find something which doesn't feel just right and you aren't the least concerned about it, what chance do you have of going to the doctor and finding an appropriate cure?
 2. In the text before us, Paul speaks of appropriate worry: THE CHRISTIAN WORRY FOR THE SPIRITUAL & THE CHRISTIAN WORRY FOR THE SPOUSE.
 - a. In fact, the apostle uses the same word for "worry" or "anxiety" in Greek that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount & that Peter uses in 1 Pt 5:6-7.
 - b. Yes, we need to be worried, to be anxious, about two things: The Spiritual & The Spouse.

II. THE CHRISTIAN WORRY FOR THE SPIRITUAL, vv. 32, 34-35.

- A. Paul wishes the Corinthians to be free from anxieties, v. 32.
1. Paul understands that in light of the coming distress upon the Corinthians, there are going to be many anxieties for the married.
 2. In the early church, there were often very severe persecutions which added to the anxieties of marriage.
 - a. John Foxe set out to recount the stories of persecution that our early brethren faced. His book, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, has become a classic in Christian literature.
 - b. The following account comes from that book:
 - Perpetua, a married lady, of about twenty-two years. Those who suffered with her were, Felicitas, a married lady, big with child at the time of her being apprehended, and Revocatus, catechumen of

Carthage, and a slave. The names of the other prisoners, destined to suffer upon this occasion, were Saturninus, Secundulus, and Satur.

- On the day appointed for their execution, they were led to the amphitheater.
 - Satur, Saturninus, and Revocatus were ordered to run the gauntlet between the hunters, or such as had the care of the wild beasts. The hunters being drawn up in two ranks, they ran between, and were severely lashed as they passed.
 - Felicitas and Perpetua were stripped, in order to be thrown to a mad bull, which made his first attack upon Perpetua, and stunned her, he then darted at Felicitas, and gored her dreadfully; but not killing them, the executioner did that office with a sword.
 - Revocatus and Satur were destroyed by wild beasts, Saturninus was beheaded, and Secundulus died in prison.
 - These executions were in the year 205, on the eighth day of March.
- 3. Granted, the deaths of Felicitas and Perpetua occurred 150 years or so after Paul wrote this Epistle. Yet, I personally know of no humanly love more strong or precious than that between a mother and child.
 - a. How would you mothers feel if you were called upon to honor God, while at the same time placing your life in danger to such a degree that you couldn't raise your children?
 - b. Is it any wonder that Paul writes throughout this section that in light of the present crisis, it's best if you don't marry?
- B. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord, v. 32
 1. In Paul's day, the single man didn't have to worry about his wife and children if he were called upon to sacrifice himself for the faith. We know that Christian men, in Paul's day, were often called upon to sacrifice themselves for the faith.
 - a. Paul himself aided in the death of Stephen.
 - b. Before Paul began his first missionary journey, we read, "About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:1-2).
 - c. To the church at Pergamum, Jesus says, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells" (Acts 2:13). Likely because of Antipas, we refer to those who die for the faith as "martyrs," for the term "witness" in Greek is "martyr."
 2. Brothers, what *you* do?
 - a. A Jew or Roman official comes to you and says, "Renounce Jesus and live."
 - You have a wife who doesn't earn a living, and she and your children might very well go hungry if you do the right thing. Would you cower under the pressure, or would you stand up and say, "I'll never renounce Jesus regardless of what you do"?
 - What if those persecutors have no desire to kill you, but they'll murder your wife and children if you pledge allegiance to Jesus?
 - b. Fortunately, we aren't called upon to make such dramatic and physically harmful statements of faith, but each of us is called upon to follow Jesus with our all.
- C. Paul writes to the women: "The unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit," v. 34.
 1. Again, Paul is emphasizing the singleness of purpose with which we are to serve the Lord.
 2. For the unmarried woman, her sole purpose can be holiness in both body and spirit: how to use her body and spirit solely for the glory of God.
- D. Paul concludes this entire paragraph by declaring: "I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord," v. 35.
 1. What Paul is saying is an attempt to help the Corinthians, not a command for them.
 - a. "Restraint" or "snare" is literally "noose" in Greek and referred to the noose that animal handlers would use to capture animals.
 - b. Thus, Paul says, "I'm not going to bind you to this, but it's best if you do it."

2. It was best so that these brethren could give their “undivided devotion to the Lord.”
 - a. We all understand “undivided devotion” in our daily lives.
 - Husbands, what would you think if you stopped by Bob Evan’s tomorrow evening and saw your wife sitting at a booth with another man, holding his hand and listening with baited breath to every word he said?
 - Wives, what would you think if you opened the next credit card statement and saw that your husband sent flowers every week to a coworker, but you never got the first rose?
 - b. Even though those of us who are married need to honor our spouses—a point we’ll make in a moment—it’s imperative that we give “undivided devotion to the Lord.”
 - I will readily admit that we cannot do it in the same way the single can, but we can still be Christian in our dealings with our spouses and children, and we can put God first in those families.
 - If we are to follow Jesus, we have no option but to put the Lord first in our lives.
 - When asked about the greatest command, Jesus quoted from Deut 6:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
 - “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rm 12:1).
 - Some people want to get caught up in the use of the word “worship” there, and declare that translations which put the word “worship” in that text aren’t faithful.
 - The word for “worship” is almost to translate using only one word.
 - The term, as used throughout Scripture, refers almost exclusively to the priests’ service in the tabernacle and temple. It really means “to act as a priest in offering sacrifices to God.”
 - “Worship” and “service” both miss the point entirely, for Paul is saying, “Like the priests in the OT took an animal, killed it and offered it to God, so you take your *living* bodies and offer them to God.”
 - As we offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices, we are devoted to the Lord.
 - c. How is our devotion to the Lord?
 - a. Are we devoted as we ought to be in worship, or do we often neglect the worship of God? Are we as devoted as we ought to be in giving, or do we spend to our heart’s content and then give the leftovers to the Lord? Are we as devoted to Christian service as we ought, or do we consider our Sunday morning attendance “punching our time card” for the week? Are we Christian in our actions in the home?
 - b. The story is told, whether true or apocryphal I do not know, that when Napoleon’s soldiers were invading Russia, they came to a village from which all the inhabitants had fled except one man.
 - He was a Russian peasant, a woodsman, and still carried his ax in his leather belt.
 - When the French captain saw him, he ordered the man to be shot immediately.
 - The soldiers fell in and leveled their guns, but the man did not seem afraid, looking fearlessly down the gun barrels.
 - The French captain noticed this, and before the soldiers could pull their triggers, ordered them to lower their guns.
 - The captain ordered that the peasant’s life be spared. “But,” he said, “we will put a mark on him. We will brand him.”
 - So the branding iron was brought out and placed in the fire. Then it was placed upon the Russian’s hand.
 - The man saw his own flesh burn and quiver, but he did not flinch or cry out. After the iron was removed the peasant saw the letter “N” branded on his palm.
 - “What is that?” he asked.
 - “This is the letter ‘N’ and it stands for Napoleon; you belong to Napoleon now,” replied the captain.

- For a moment the poor man did not know what to do or say. His pain was intense. Then an idea occurred to him. He had always been a loyal and patriotic Russian. Now was the time to show it, even in the presence of his enemies.
- At once he placed his burned hand on something solid.
 - The French soldiers looked on, laughing, and jeering at him.
 - The brave man took the ax out of his belt, and swinging it high, brought it down with such might that he might sever his hand.
 - “There,” he said to the soldiers, “the hand may belong to Napoleon, but I am a Russian. If I must die, I will die a Russian.”
- c. Brethren, is that not the attitude we need when it comes to service to our Lord & God—we’re not going to allow anything to get in the way of undistracted service to him? What is getting in our way?

III. THE CHRISTIAN WORRY FOR THE SPOUSE, vv. 33-34.

- A. “The married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided The married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.”
- B. Brethren, we must not think for a moment that Paul is discouraging marriage in general, for elsewhere he writes a high view of marriage.
1. Even in this book, Paul holds a high view of marriage.
 - a. Concerning his rights as an apostle, Paul writes, “Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” (9:5).
 - Apparently, the other apostles, the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas were married men who regularly took their wives with them as they traveled the globe proclaiming the message of Jesus; that’s the easiest way to read those words.
 - Paul doesn’t say that the apostles were acting wrongly; in fact, he says that he has a right to a believing wife, too.
 - b. About the silence of women, Paul writes, “If there is anything they [women] desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home” (14:35). How could these women ask their husbands at home if they weren’t married?
 2. Elsewhere Paul speaks highly of marriage.
 - a. We often point to Ephesians 5 about the roles of husbands and wives.
 - It’s right to do that, for the text does speak about the roles in a Christian home.
 - However, Paul makes clear that he isn’t really speaking about the roles in a Christian home, but he’s speaking about Jesus and his church.
 - “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (5:32).
 - How could Paul write about Jesus and the church, using images of marriage, if marriage is to be discouraged?
 - b. In 1 Tm 5, Paul writes about the church’s helping widows who are true widows.
 - From the context, it seems quite clear that Paul is writing that widows who are not in need should help those widows who are in need.
 - In so doing, Paul outlines the qualifications women should have to help the needy widows.
 - Paul greatly discourages Timothy from appointing younger widows to care for the needy widows. He writes, “I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander” (5:14).
 - How could Paul have the younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households if marriage is to be discouraged?
 3. The whole context of Scripture causes me to be absolutely persuaded that Paul is not writing throughout 1 Corinthians 7 that we should never get married. However, for the Corinthians around the time Paul was writing, it was quite advisable for them not to get married because of the pressures of having a family in the midst of persecution.

C. What are we to do with this text?

1. We need to learn the importance of pleasing our spouses.
 - a. We have, in the past couple of weeks, read texts which speak of our roles in the home.
 - b. I'm not going to reread those texts this morning. On the other hand, I want us to think seriously about how we can please our spouses:
 - Wives, what can you do to please your husbands? Husbands, what can you do to please your wives?
 - Do you know the best way to find out what your spouse needs? Every single counseling book I've ever read, and I've read several, suggest one way to please your spouse: Ask your spouse what he or she needs.
2. Will we commit this week to making our marriages what we know they can and should be?
 - a. A woman seeking counsel from Dr. George W. Crane, the psychologist, confided that she hated her husband and intended to divorce him.
 - "I want to hurt him all I can," she declared firmly.
 - "Well, in that case," said Dr. Crane, "I advise you to start showering him with compliments. When you have become indispensable to him, when he thinks you love him devotedly, then start the divorce action. That is the way to hurt him."
 - Some months later the wife returned to report that all was going well. She had followed the suggested course.
 - "Good," said Dr. Crane. "Now's the time to file for divorce."
 - "Divorce!" the woman said indignantly. "Never. I love my husband dearly!"
 - b. She decided she was going to please her husband and not worry about anything else, and it made a difference. Will we commit to serving our spouses sacrificially? Do you need to come to Jesus and begin serving him sacrificially?