

Spares, Spares, Spares Everywhere

1 Cor 7:25-31

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Not too long ago, a woman came into the post office and asked to see a selection of 37-cent stamps.
1. She wanted to choose a stamp design and theme appropriate for the wedding invitations she was mailing.
 2. After careful consideration, she happily announced she'd found exactly the right one: the John Paul Jones commemorative stamp that bears his rallying cry, "I have not yet begun to fight."
- B. If you're married, you understand that illustration quite well.
1. Forget about arguing. I'm sure that young lady meant such when she chose that postage stamp.
 2. But, if you stop to think about it for a moment, there's a lot of fighting which takes place in marriage which has nothing to do with arguing.
 - a. When you get married, don't you have to struggle to make enough money to support the family?
 - b. As you struggle to earn enough to support the family, don't you struggle to find enough time for one another?
 - c. When children come along, aren't there a whole new set of struggles? As those children grow, it's hard to find time for homework, little league practice, and everything else.
 3. In this morning's text, Paul speaks of struggles in marriage, and as he does so, he informs us of "SPARES, SPARES, SPARES EVERYWHERE." He writes of two spares: SPARE TROUBLES & SPARE TIME.

II. SPARE TROUBLES, vv. 25-28.

- A. We've mentioned the struggles of marriage, and in our text, Paul wishes to spare the Corinthians the problems inherent in marriage.
- B. Before the apostle cautions the Corinthians about the struggles of marriage, he writes, "Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy," v. 25.
1. "Now concerning" serves as a break in this Epistle; that phrase likely brings up another point the Corinthians had made in their letter to Paul.
 2. The English Standard reads that Paul is turning to give advice on the betrothed, but the KJV & NIV both read "virgins."
 - a. The ESV places "betrothed" here, for down in v. 36 it becomes obvious that the apostle is speaking of individuals about to be married.
 - b. Up in vv. 8-9, Paul writes to the unmarried and widows. The term there means anyone who is single; the term is literally "unmarried." The term here is literally virgin, but the way Paul uses the term throughout this text, makes obvious he is writing not to all the unmarried but specifically to those about to be married.
 3. What Paul says next startles and troubles some good folks: "I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy," v. 25.
 - a. How on earth could Paul, when writing Scripture, declare he has no command from God so he's going to give his opinion?
 - b. Paul has no command from the Lord concerning this; we don't have a command from the Lord in the same way Paul did not—Jesus never spoke to this issue during his ministry.
 - c. If you stop and think about it, there are many things we do as a church that Jesus never told us to do:
 - He never spoke about what to do if you fall back into sin after your baptism: Peter tells us that.
 - He never spoke about the organization of the church: we have the example of Paul in Acts & we have the words of Paul to Timothy.

- d. I could go on & give other examples, but you get the picture. How can we be a church, striving to do the will of Jesus, when Jesus hasn't spoken on these issues?
- Jesus said to the apostles, "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).
 - I know some folk want to apply this text to all Christians, but they forget that Jesus is speaking to the apostles, and the apostles only.
 - Two things about this text:
 - The Holy Spirit would teach the apostles all things; thus, if an apostle says it by inspiration, it is as binding as if Jesus said it himself.
 - Also, the Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance all that Jesus had said to the apostles; thus, Paul knows if Jesus spoke to this issue or not.
 - Jesus tells the apostles, "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18:18).
 - The Greek does not mean "shall be bound in heaven" or "shall be loosed in heaven" but means "has been bound" and "has been loosed."
 - In other words, what the apostles declare to us has already been decided by the Father.
- e. Therefore, what Paul writes to us by his judgment is the will of God.
- C. Paul writes, "I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is," v. 26.
1. What was the present distress the Corinthians were facing?
 - a. We do not know; in fact the word translated "present" could mean "impending"—it may be that the crisis hasn't yet started but is around the corner.
 - b. We have no idea what the crisis in Corinth was. It could have been persecution (as I personally tend to believe) or it could have been the problems of immorality in Corinth or the problems in the Corinthian church or any number of things.
 2. Think for a moment.
 - a. Guys, can you imagine what it been like to disobey your employer when he asked you to sacrifice to Aphrodite, knowing that if you get fired your precious children might go hungry?
 - b. Can you imagine preaching the gospel, when doing so might get you killed and leave your wife without any help whatsoever?
 - c. Ladies, what would you do if you knew obedience to the Lord could mean death and that your children would be raised by a pagan?
- D. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free? Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife? v. 27. Paul simply repeats his instructions in the previous paragraph: stay where you are.
- E. If you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that, v. 28.
1. Marriage is not sinful. In fact, it cannot be sinful, for it was God himself who created the woman for the man.
 2. However, those who do marry face many worldly troubles.
 - a. The NIV & ESV miss this translation; the KJV gets it right.
 - The word "many" does not occur in the Greek; in fact, trouble is singular, not plural.
 - It is literally: "But even if you do marry you do not sin and if the virgin marries she does not sin, but these ones shall have tribulation in the flesh."
 - b. What is the "tribulation in the flesh" Paul has in mind?
 - I'm convinced the apostle informs us in the next verse: time is short and we need to be working in the kingdom. That's one reason Paul tells us it's best not to get married.
 - There is that tension between fulfilling our obligations to our spouses and families and fulfilling our obligations to God.
 - A lady got quite irritated after her husband left on a Saturday morning without mowing the yard.
 - She picked up the phone and called one of the local elders and said, "Brother Johnson, how could you schedule a door-knocking campaign today? My yard needs mowing!"

- That sister did not portray the heart of Jesus, for the lost were always his focus. But, that story illustrates quite well the tensions which can arise when we strive to serve God and our spouses.
3. Paul writes in order that the Corinthians might be spared this “tribulation in the flesh.”
- F. What does this text say in the modern world?
1. Here’s what Paul is saying in this text: “It’s best if you stay single, so that you are not encumbered with a family and have more time to devote to service in the kingdom.”
 2. That has two very important implications for us:
 - a. First, all of us, have serious obligations to labor in the church for the glory of God, and we’ll come back to that point as we continue through this paragraph.
 - b. Second, if we are encumbered with family, we have obligations to that family.
 - Some might object to the use of the word “encumbered,” for it implies a burden, and people would quickly say that marriage is far from a burden.
 - Those folks have a good point; however, God has placed burdens on husbands and wives, and once they become parents, there is another set of burdens he places on them.
 - Wives are to submit to and respect their husbands (Eph 5:22, 33), to love their husbands and be working in the home (Tit 2:4-5).
 - Husbands have much responsibility toward their wives:
 - Eph 5:25-30.
 - “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (Col 3:19).
 - “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pt 3:7).
 - Parents, which God does not expect us to become unless we are married, have responsibilities toward their children:
 - “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).
 - “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:21).
 - c. It doesn’t take too much imagination for me to think the Corinthians had many struggles fulfilling their marital obligations in the world they inhabited.
 - d. While the struggles we face in fulfilling our marital obligations may not be as severe as they might have been for the Corinthians, we need to, as much as possible, fulfill those obligations!

III. SPARE TIME, vv. 29-31.

- A. Paul now expounds on why he deems it best that people not get tangled up in marriage: the appointed time has grown very short, v. 29.
1. The KJV & NIV simply have the word “time” rather than “appointed time.”
 - a. The problem with this word is that it sometimes refers simply to time; the Greeks might have used this term to say, “Time changed last night.”
 - b. They might have also use this term for when they prayed, “Bring us back at the next appointed time.”
 - c. Because the word can mean simply “time” or “a fixed time,” in Scripture it often denotes time the Father has set.
 - When the disciples asked Jesus if he was going to establish the kingdom after the Resurrection, Jesus replies, “It is not for you to know *times* or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7).
 - In writing about the Second Coming, Paul says, “Now concerning the *times* and seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you” (1 Thess 5:1)—Paul goes on to say, “You don’t know when that appointed time is.”
 2. “Very short” refers to drawing together or compressing.
 - a. The term was used of the wrapping of a body in a shroud—drawing it together, wrapping it up.

- b. Thus, Paul is telling these Corinthians that the time established by the Father is compressing, it's short, it's drawing to a close.
3. What does Paul mean when he says that the appointed time has grown very short?
- a. There are some who mistakenly say that Paul didn't understand that the Second Coming would not occur in his lifetime.
- That cannot be, for:
 - It wasn't for them to know the times the Father had set by his authority, and
 - He told the Thessalonians he didn't need to write to them about times and seasons, because the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night.
 - There are times Paul seems to expect a quite imminent return by Jesus, yet Paul was quite cognizant that, while he watched for that Day, he had no idea when it would come.
- b. Then, what did Paul mean?
- The context of this passage informs us.
 - Paul speaks of a coming crisis in the Corinthian congregation—All three translations I used in preparation have the word “present,” rather than “impending”; however, the Greek term can mean “impending” and the idea of an appointed time coming to an end seems to enhance that view.
 - Those who marry are going to experience a crisis in the flesh, and Paul is going to write in the text paragraph that it's good to have undivided devotion to the Lord.
 - Here's what I'm thinking: some type of persecution or other trouble is just around the corner for the Corinthian congregation, and it's best if they're not married when that trouble comes.
- B. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away, vv. 29-31.
1. Because of the coming crisis in Corinth, the things of this world didn't matter—If you have a wife, forget about her; if you lose a loved one, don't mourn a bit; if your wife has a new baby, don't pass out the candy cigars telling everyone about it; if you pass the Ferrari dealership and there's your 2008 dream car on sale for a dollar, forget about it; and whatever you have to do with this world, stop it.
2. Those are harsh words, which are difficult to practice. What on earth does the Lord want?
- a. We need to understand that Paul is using what is called in literature “hyperbole,” which is just a fancy way of saying “exaggeration.”
- Kids, next time your mom or dad says, “I've told you a million times to stop that,” you can look and say, “I see Mom, you're using hyperbole.”
 - Husbands, next time your wife says, “You never help me around the house,” you can look at her and say, “Honey, that's a really nice hyperbole.”
 - I hope you kids and husbands don't do that, because I'd rather you be here than at Curry's next Sunday. But, I want you to see that we exaggerate all the time and understand it perfectly.
- b. Anytime someone is speaking or writing and exaggerates for emphasis, it's always good to ask, “Why is that person exaggerating to get his or her point across?”
- If a parents tells a child something a million times, it usually means the child isn't listening to what the parent has said previously; if a spouse tells the other that he or she never does something, the speaker is often feeling overwhelmed.
 - Why is Paul writing this way?
 - The apostle is speaking about our priorities.
 - Are our priorities going to be the things of this world—family, happiness, success—or are they going to be the things of God?
 - Jesus spoke pointedly about our priorities: Lk 14:25-33.
 - A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, struggling to carry an eight-point buck.

- “Where’s Harry?” someone asked him. “Harry had a stroke of some kind. He’s a couple miles back up the trail.”
 - “You left Harry lying there, and carried the deer back?” “Well,” said the hunter, “I figured no one was going to steal Harry.”
 - Brethren, do we not often do the same thing?
 - We pass someone going to a devil’s hell, and we’ve got too many other things to do than to teach the Gospel.
 - The elders need someone to help minister in one way or another, but it’s going to take our Saturdays and we just can’t miss that football game.
 - The deacons need someone to help teach children, but we just can’t get up that early on Sunday mornings.
 - Brothers and sisters, where are our priorities?
3. The reason these Corinthian brethren needed to get their priorities straight is that “the present form of this world is passing away.”
- a. It’s foolish beyond words to get caught up in the things of this world, for everything we value in this world is coming to nothing: 1 Jn 2:15-17.
 - Brethren, you know that money you’re saving? It’s going to be burned up one of these days, but those people who didn’t hear the gospel because you didn’t give it to a missionary are going to go to hell.
 - That promotion you worked overtime to get isn’t going to matter at Judgment, but that child who has lost his faith because you weren’t home to teach him is going to matter.
 - That yard you spent so much time keeping immaculate is going to be burned up, but that neighbor you chewed out every time his dog relieved himself in your yard is going to go to hell because you lost your influence.
 - b. What are our priorities this morning? Do you need to come and make Jesus your priority?