

END-TIMES ISSUES



#117 Commandment #7 – Marriage options (2).

GOD DOESN'T TELL US TO KNOW ALL THE END-TIME DETAILS. HE TELLS US TO BE READY.

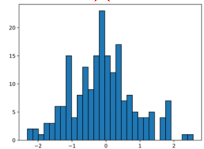
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"NORMAL CHRISTIANITY."

DO WE KNOW WHAT IT IS? HAVE WE EVER SEEN IT?

What even *is* "NORMAL"?

- What "standard" do we use? AVERAGE = HERE ⇨ ★
- Do we make a chart of all "church members" and come up with an "average"?
- Is "normal" different for each church?
- Does a "normal" even exist? If it does...
 - What criteria should we use to *define* "normal"?



"NORMAL CHRISTIANITY" – WHAT IS IT?

- Should we base our definition of "normal" on the "average" of all members of a church (or denomination)?
 - ✓ If we do this, then we end up with *many* definitions, some of them quite contradictory to others.
 - ✓ Ultimately, this means we have no actual "normal." It becomes all relative to what the people are like!
 - ✓ This leaves us with *no objective standard* that we can compare ourselves to.
- What if we base our definition of "normal" on what the *Bible* defines as "following Jesus"?
 - ✓ If we do this, then we end up with *one* definition.
 - ✓ If we do this, we might discover that some "churches" have *never* experienced "normal Christianity."

Why would it matter?

- The implications are serious.
 - ✓ If we evaluate things based on *ourselves*, all we are doing is making ourselves the "standard" for comparison. *This is a foolish expression of arrogance* – one that Paul rejected.

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves.

When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, **they show their ignorance.**

2 Corinthians 10:12 (BSB)
 - ✓ But if we base things on *Scripture* – accepting *all* of it, not selectively choosing what we *want* – then we have an objective standard *outside of us*, to which we can compare ourselves.
 - » People in some churches might not recognize the standard, *because of how far they have strayed from it.*

Those who follow Jesus' standard have *not* fully reached it. *But they recognize what it is, and pursue it.*

★ Why bring this up, when studying "Marriage options in 1 Corinthians 7"? ★

- Our views tend to influence how we interpret 1 Corinthians 7.
 - ✓ Some people say that this chapter was based on a "cultural" matter, or that it involved a "local issue" in the Corinthian community of that time. They claim the instructions aren't relevant to us.
 - ✓ Some may say that we can learn "principles" from it (though *nobody* can agree on what those "principles" might be).
- Those who interpret the passage this way are not always opposed to accepting what Scripture says ...
 - ✓ It may come down to the way they interpret a phrase in verse 26, which is often translated as "the present distress."
 - ✓ Yet if we understand what Jesus and Paul describe as "normal Christianity," we would be more inclined to think that the verse simply refers to "life as a Christian" in this present world.
 - ✓ There is a *third* possibility: If there were local issues (= not proven to exist), Paul may have used them to *point* to the "Christian life" issues.

So, what is this "normal Christianity"?

- It's a radical change or reorientation in the way we *think*, what we *value* and how we live. It involves a willingness to ...
 - ✓ Accept the values of Scripture and make them *our* values. (This requires a willingness to find out what Scripture says.)
 - ✓ Accept the teachings of Scripture; let it change the way we think.
 - ✓ Deny ourselves (such as our desires and interests) and take up the cross of suffering, following Christ's example.
 - ✓ Learn to honor God in all that we do – including in the daily mundane activities of life. (Scripture shows us how to do this.)
 - ✓ Trust God for power to do these things, because we quickly realize our *inability* to do them ourselves.
 - ✓ Develop strong relationships with other followers of Christ (when available); for that is normally the way that God accomplishes his greatest work in people's lives. (He often works *through* people.)

☞ If you want to know more about these (and other) things, look in the Bible! It's all there, waiting to be discovered!

ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS (incomplete list):

- ✓ Change is necessary – Matthew 18:3.
- ✓ Acknowledging Jesus in public – Matthew 10:32-33; Mark 8:38.
- ✓ You must love Jesus more than you love your family... or even yourself; and carry your cross; you may lose your life; etc. – Matthew 10:37-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 14:26-27; John 12:25.
- ✓ Rich people must be willing to part with their riches, and help those who have genuine needs – Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22.
- ✓ Many religious people won't be able to enter the kingdom of heaven – Matthew 7:21-23.

BLESSINGS... BUT ALSO TRIALS/TROUBLES:

- ✓ Sharing in Christ's suffering comes *before* sharing in his glory – Romans 8:17.
- ✓ There will be blessings, but persecution will also be present – Mark 10:29-30.
- ✓ Trusting in Christ *and* suffering for him – Philippians 1:29.

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SOME OF THE TRIALS/TROUBLES YOU MAY EXPERIENCE:

- ✓ You *cannot* please both people and God – Galatians 1:10.
- ✓ You can expect trouble in this world – John 16:33.
- ✓ The world will hate you – John 15:18; 1 John 3:13.
- ✓ You may be hated and betrayed – Matthew 10:21-22.
- ✓ You can expect conflict even within your own family – Matthew 10:34-36.
- ✓ People may kill you, thinking they're doing a favor for God – John 16:2. (Today, many Christians experience this in Muslim countries.)
- ✓ There are many examples of God's people being persecuted throughout Scripture.
- ✓ It's a common theme, clear to the end – Revelation 1:9; 6:9; 7:14; 12:17.

"We must endure many **hardships** to enter the kingdom of God ..."

Acts 14:22b (BSB)

Indeed, all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be **persecuted**, ...

2 Timothy 3:12 (BSB)

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RESPONDING TO TRIALS/TROUBLES:

- ✓ Don't be surprised when it happens – 1 Peter 4:12.
- ✓ Being aware that Christians *worldwide* are also suffering – 1 Peter 5:9.
- ✓ Having the attitude Christ had – 1 Peter 4:1 (+ context).
- ✓ Consider the early Christian's response to persecution – Acts 4:23-30.
- ✓ Paul's example: following Jesus is more important than life – Acts 20:24.
- ✓ In all this... not separated from Christ's love – Romans 8:35-39.
- ✓ God uses it to produce a harvest of righteousness and peace – Hebrews 12:7, 11.
- ✓ Joy, because of what it accomplishes in us – James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7.

Following Jesus isn't *only* about suffering. There are many *joyful* aspects to it, even in this present life. But we are focusing on the *suffering* aspect, because: 1) so many people live in denial that it exists, and 2) an awareness of this helps us to understand the significance of 1 Corinthians 7:26.

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"NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE"?

THESE THINGS MAY BE A GREAT "IDEAL"; BUT THEY ARE **UNREALISTIC** FOR REAL LIFE!

ACTUALLY, JESUS CONSTANTLY SAYS THEY ARE A **NECESSITY**. WE CAN'T BE SAVED WITHOUT THEM.

THAT'S WHY WE NEED TO **RELY ON GOD** FOR THE POWER AND ABILITY TO DO THEM!

How does all this apply to 1 Corinthians 7?

- IF you accept this definition (which you can easily find in Scripture):

* **The world will hate you.** Therefore...

- » You will experience trials and hardships of various kinds. Some may be severe; others not so much.
- » You will discover that others who are like-minded also experience trials and hardships.
- » Depending on your situation in life, these trials may vary in frequency and intensity; *but they will exist.*

☞ You will look forward to the future, when you are in Jesus' presence; but right now, **this will be your "present distress."**

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WITH THESE THINGS IN MIND, WE CAN LOOK AT PAUL'S "FOUNDATION" FOR 1 CORINTHIANS 7.

We could summarize it as: "Living in the end-times."

- There are three issues to consider:
 1. Our present trials.
 2. The time is short.
 3. This present world is passing away.
- These issues should influence our perspective on **all** of life, not just marriage.
 - ✓ As followers of Jesus, our focus is *not* on the "now," but on the future. Yet we still live in the "now"; so we must live in a way that honors God, and continue to maintain a "future focus."

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Issue #1: Our present trials.

This can be translated a few different ways. Examples:

Because of **the impending crisis** I think it best for you to remain as you are.

1 Corinthians 7:26 (NET)

I think that in view of **the present distress** it is good for a person to remain as he is.

1 Corinthians 7:26 (ESV)

1. The trials are "impending" or "present."

- ✓ ἐνίστημι (enistēmi), Strong's concordance # 1764.

☞ It can refer to something that is *about* to happen [= "impending"], or that has *begun* to happen [= it's now "present"]. In both cases, the emphasis is that it will continue, at least for an indefinite period of time.

IT'S PRESENT; IT'S NOW HERE!

IT'S IMPENDING; IT'S ALMOST HERE!



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- Other examples of verses using the word "impending/present."
 - A contrast between what is present now and what may happen sometime in the future – Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22.
 - This present age is evil.

[The Lord Jesus Christ] gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the **present** evil age ...
 Galatians 1:4a (BSB)
 - In the last days, terrible times will come (= will be present).

But understand this: In the last days terrible times **will come**.
 2 Timothy 3:1 (BSB)
 - The Thessalonians had heard a false rumor that the "Day of the Lord" had already come (= was already present).

[Don't] be easily disconcerted or alarmed by any spirit or message or letter seeming to be from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord **has already come**.
 2 Thessalonians 2:2 (BSB)

2. They are a "crisis" or "distress"; a "pressure" or "time of trouble."

- ἀνάγκη (anagkē), Strong's concordance # 318. **Used two ways:**
 - A. Compulsion – A "pressure" to do something (whether from an internal desire or an external force); the concept of "necessity" – things that are an absolute obligation (often the consequences of something else).
 - ★ B. Distress or trouble – The condition of distress, resulting from the unpleasant situations of life that we must inevitably go through. (Sometimes it's the consequence of the "pressures" of life.)
 - For a follower of Jesus, God permits these things to occur. We are sharing in Christ's suffering; and because of this, we will someday share in his glory (Romans 8:17). See also: 2 Corinthians 4:17; James 1:2-4.
- A related word, in verse 28, is "trouble" [θλίψις (thlipsis), Strong's concordance # 2347]. Like the above word, it also focuses on affliction and distress, but from a different perspective. The word in verse 26 focuses on the distressing condition; this word (verse 28) focuses on the actual experiencing of that distress.

- Other examples of "distress/trouble." [Definition B = in 1 Cor. 7:26.]
 - A. Compulsion: (Most of the verses belong to this category.)
 - Many verses mention people who need or are compelled to do something – write a letter, submit to authority, release a prisoner, preach the good news, etc.
 - Things that cause people to stumble (into sin) need to occur; but woe to those who are the cause of them – Matthew 18:7. (These things are inevitable; i.e., we can't stop them, because we live in a sinful world.)
 - ★ B. (Conditions that cause) Distress, trouble: (These conditions may exist now or in the future.)
 - Paul was content in times of distress – 2 Corinthians 12:10. He was encouraged during these times of distress, as he saw the spiritual growth of others – 1 Thessalonians 3:7. His response to trouble demonstrated that he was a servant of God – 2 Corinthians 6:4.
 - In the end times, there will be great distress in the land – Luke 21:23.

- Experiencing distress/trouble (the related word, found in 1 Cor. 7:28):
 - In the world, God's people will experience trouble – John 16:33. (This is the most common theme.)

"We must endure many **hardships** to enter the kingdom of God ..."
 - "Temporary believers" tend to leave when trouble comes – Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17
 - We can rejoice because God uses tribulation to accomplish good in our lives – 2 Corinthians 7:4 (and many other verses).

For our light and momentary **affliction** is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison.
 - The end times will be characterized by great tribulation – Matthew 24:21 (and many other verses).
 - The affliction of famine – Acts 7:11.
 - People who do evil will experience eternal tribulation – Romans 2:9.

The reason for focusing on these word definitions:

(Verse 26) → (IMPENDING or PRESENT) + (CRISIS or DISTRESS)

(Verse 28) → (TROUBLE, TRIBULATION, etc.)

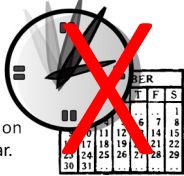
- Verse 26 itself doesn't define the specific way this phrase is applied, although the context (vs. 29, 31) focuses on end time issues.
 - In recent years, some people have started saying that this verse refers to a local event at Corinth, rather than the end times, so (according to them) the verses (or the chapter) don't apply to us.
 - Yet nothing in the context indicates a merely local application.
- We have seen that these words are often used to describe trials that are common to any Christian, and which will characterize life at the end of the end times. We would argue that the end time context of verses 29 and 31 defines how we should interpret verse 26.

WHAT ARE THE "END TIMES" OR THE "LAST DAYS"?

- The period of time between Jesus' incarnation (first coming) and his return (second coming). These times are characterized by:
 - "Terrible times" – widespread moral corruption, false messiahs and spiritual apostasy, and widespread disasters, etc.
 - The proclamation of the Good News throughout the world, and the advancing of the kingdom of God.
 - Both of these appear to increase as the end of the age approaches.
- All Christians, from the days of the apostles until now, have lived in the "end times."
 - Today, we are closer to their conclusion, than was any generation before us. This fact is to influence the way we live, our values, etc.
 - Yet for every generation, Scripture tells us to maintain a sense of urgency, and an expectation that the conclusion may come at any moment. This fact is to influence the way we live, our values, etc.

Issue #2: The time is short.

What I am saying, brothers*, is that **the time is short.**
1 Corinthians 7:29 (BSB)



1. This does NOT mean:

- ✓ **Chronological time** – seen by movement on the clock or sequential days on a calendar.

2. This DOES mean:

- ✓ **Occasions for opportunity** – a time to accomplish something.
- ✓ There is a greater emphasis on the *event* or *opportunity* itself, than on the *timing* of that event. Examples: a *time* for harvest; the *time* Jesus will return; the *time* is near; etc.
- ✓ Often the activity of God is described this way. The event will happen (= "opportunity time"); but we don't know the exact time or date when it will happen (= "chronological time").

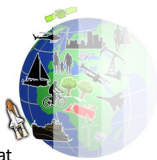
* (This seems to imply that the previous verses are *also* end time issues.)

The emphasis is on the **event**, rather than on a **date on the calendar.**

- **What it means in the context of 1 Corinthians 7:**
 - ✓ This statement has an "end times" focus. This present world system is coming to an end. Jesus is going to return.
 - » The "time" remaining before all this occurs is "short." Our *opportunity* to live in this present world will soon be ending.
 - ★ **Because of this, we are not to be preoccupied with the things of this world!**
 - » If we accept the "end times" focus that Scripture gives us, the things of this world will be of *less significance* to us. After all, they'll all be gone in a "short" time – and our focus is on what will last *forever!*
 - » By the way: If we *die* before Jesus returns, we will have reached our own "end time," and these things will *still* prove true!

Issue #3: This present world is passing away.

For this world in its present form is **passing away.**
1 Corinthians 7:31b (BSB)



- **This is an ongoing theme in Scripture: This present world is temporary.**
 - ✓ Both Old and New Testaments tell us that it is going to be replaced with a *new* world.
- **"But it's been thousands of years ... and nothing has happened!"**
 - ✓ That's *not* a good reason for us to *ignore* or *disobey* God, when he tells us what attitude to have!
 - ✓ The only reason he hasn't yet returned is so that he can give *more* people an opportunity to be saved *before* he comes.

The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is **patient with you**, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.
2 Peter 3:9 (CSB)

- ✓ God even tells us the type of attitude we should have, during this "delay" in his coming!

... what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to **live holy and godly lives** as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

... in keeping with his promise we are **looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to **be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.**

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation ...
2 Peter 3:11b-12a, 13-15a (NIV)

HOW TO LIVE!

1. Live holy and godly lives.
2. Look forward to a world, filled with righteousness.
3. Be spotless, blameless and at peace with God.
4. Remember that this "delay" is occurring so that *more people can be saved!*

TODAY'S MISSION: REFLECTION!

What Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 is based on a two-part "end times" focus. These two parts involve:

1. Living a "normal Christian life" means that the world will oppose you.
2. This present world will soon pass away.

REFLECT ON THESE ISSUES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE THEY SHOULD HAVE IN YOUR LIFE.

If you have any questions about them, read the Bible and find out!!

(The New Testament – God's final revelation to us – is a good place to start.)

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