

EAST
Singapore

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CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Lesson 2

Significant Singlehood

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The single state is becoming more popular and in many ways an increasingly greater problem than ever before. Cultures are divided by two diametrically opposed philosophies on the single state. There are those who look upon the single state as something less desirable than marriage; therefore, from their perspective, they look upon a single person as abnormal. On the other hand, there are those who feel the single state is more desirable than marriage; therefore they usually advocate free sex for those in the single state. There is a third approach to the single state and that is the Christian view of celibacy which says the single state is good and God has planned for some to stay single.
- B. Many singles, especially between the ages of 25 and 35, push the “panic button” and feel something is wrong with them. It has never occurred to them that God may have intended for them to stay single.
- C. For most young lives, the most important thing is to get married. They think about it, talk about, dream about it, pray about it, and fantasize about it, and of course, they worry about it. They are possessed by this one thought and it overshadows every other area of life. They rationalize to marry would be to live happily ever after and not to marry would be to live a life not worth living. Not to marry would be the ultimate defeat and one would be doomed to a life of misery and drudgery.
- D. Married adults, consciously and unconsciously, put a lot of pressure on singles to marry. Have you ever been in a conversation that goes like this? “Poor Benny Bachelor. He is 35 years old, attractive, has a good job, a dynamic personality, but his life is wasted without a wife.” Or, “Pray for Sally Single. She is 30 years old, attractive, spiritual and not married, and she doesn’t want to get married. Something is wrong with Sally Single.”
- E. It never occurs to singles and married adults who are always trying to marry off singles that there is something greater than marriage. There is something more important than marriage for some people and that something is meaningful, significant, God-directed singlehood. It is this state Paul emphasizes when he writes to the singles in the Church of Corinth.

II. SINGLEHOOD IN TIMES OF CRISIS 1 Corinthians 7:25-28

- A. *“Now about virgins.”*
 1. The Corinthians in a previous letter wrote Paul asking him to answer various questions on marriage, and now the question of celibacy comes up. Is it right and biblical to stay single? Is singlehood morally superior to the marriage state? Is a person a second class citizen if he or she is single?
 2. The discussion of celibacy arose out of a special problem peculiar to Corinth and the Corinthian Christians.
 - a. There was the problem of sexual immorality which was wrapped up with the pagan religions of Greece. There were ten thousand prostitute-priestesses in the Temple of

Aphrodite--all single. It was part of the worship of Aphrodite to be sexually immoral. There were also many male prostitutes who were single. Some Christians, in order to combat this immorality, were pushing the single state for Christians. Abstention from all sex was one possible answer. Of course, this was a reaction to all the perversion of sex in the city.

- b. There was also the problem of imminent persecution for Christians and in times of persecution the single state has some obvious advantages, especially if there are no family responsibilities.
 3. The Corinthian Church had a particular false teaching in their midst. There were some who were teaching singlehood was a superior moral state to marriage and a person was more spiritual if he or she decided to stay single.
 4. The Apostle Paul will not deprecate the single state. In fact, he will exalt it. His conclusion will be that celibacy is desirable, but not demanded. Marriage is good, but celibacy is better under certain circumstances if a person has the gift of celibacy.
- B. *“Virgins”*
1. This is primarily a reference to young, unmarried women who had never known a man sexually. It appears the Corinthian Church asked Paul about the relationship of virgins to marriage, but Paul applied the truth to both young unmarried men and women in context.
 2. There is no double standard in God’s will for unmarried men and women. God expects men and women to be virgins before marriage. The saying, “Boys must sow their oats, and girls must be proper” is straight from the pit. God’s standard is virginity for both men and women before marriage.
- C. *“I have no command from the **Lord**, but I give a judgment (opinion) as one by the **Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.**”*
1. The Lord Jesus while on earth did not teach on the subject of the single state, so Paul is going to give his opinion on this matter. This is sanctified opinion because Paul speaks as an Apostle as he writes inspired scripture.
 2. The Apostle Paul was “trustworthy” and in 1 Cor. 7:40 he says, *“I also have the Spirit of the Lord.”* What Paul had to say was just as inspired as what Jesus had to say.
- D. *“Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.”*
1. The first reason Paul thinks it is better to stay single is because of the present crisis. The Greek actually says, “It is good for a man (*anthropos*) to remain as he is.” So obviously he is speaking to men as well as women.
 2. In context, Paul is obviously referring to some specific crisis problem the Corinthian Christians were experiencing. He is not talking about life in general with its difficulties, but about times of crisis.
 3. My personal opinion is that this is referring to persecution, for we know from Acts 18 the city of Corinth was antagonistic to Christians. The days in Corinth were hard ones for believers. It was a time of persecution and suffering when one might have to leave home and loved ones in a moments notice and flee those who hated Christianity.
 4. In light of these desperate times, Paul felt it best for men and women to stay single. Single folks are best prepared to handle the pressures of being a Christian in times of persecution.

- E. *“Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.”*
Under pressure conditions, it is wise to stay single, but if married one must do all he can to protect his family.
- F. *“But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.”*
Notice Paul does not snarl at marriage in times of crisis. He just feels it is better to stay single. The fact of the matter is that most will not stay single, but it is best if they do
- G. *“But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.”*
1. Paul is not saying marriage automatically brings trouble into one’s life, although many will testify to the fact that marriage, while it lifted many pressures, has added many more—cares, children, education, food, clothing, housing, bills, in-laws, taxes and so forth.
 2. In context, Paul is talking about trouble in times of crisis due to persecution. It is one thing for a man to face persecution and even martyrdom, but it is quite another to bring this upon his wife and children. A man may be a hero, but turn coward at the sight of his wife and children being persecuted because of his faith in Christ.
 3. Paul’s point is that in times of crisis, single life has advantages. Singles can be more flexible, can adapt more readily to certain cataclysmic actions, can pick up and move if necessary, and can act without handling the affairs of others for whom they are responsible. Paul is not putting down marriage, but is suggesting that for some singlehood might be the better course to take because marriage increases responsibilities.
 4. What then is the application to us? There is a biblical principle. In times of crisis, it may not be best to marry. There are many circumstances when marriage is not advisable or expedient.
 - a. When there is persecution of the church.
 - b. When one has been diagnosed as having a terminal or incurable illness.
 - c. When one is in deep financial debt.
 - d. When there are major areas of philosophical and religious differences between two people.
 - e. When one has to go to war.
 - f. When there is a fierce independent spirit in a person.
 - g. When God calls a person to some dangerous field of service on the mission field.

III. SINGLEHOOD IN LIGHT OF THE BREVITY OF LIFE 7:29-31

- A. *“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short.”*
1. Paul now gives the second reason why it is wise to stay single, which is that the time is short, and this is covered in verses 29-31. Some have thought this is a reference to the second coming of Christ, but it does not say this. I personally think Paul is referring to the brevity of life. The older one gets, the quicker time seems to fly by. All men become aware of the shortness of time. Christians become aware of how few years they have on earth to do the things God desires, and to fully experience the exiting adventures God has for those who love Him.
 2. Non-Christians are aware of the shortness of time too, and their philosophy is, “Time is flying; we only go around life once, so lets grab all we can of it. Let’s live it up with gusto. There is nothing beyond death so we have to experience all of life we can.” This

certainly is not the Christian philosophy of life. Christians are to use fleeting time to the maximum for eternal purposes—to reach the lost and dying world, to build up the Church, to serve the Lord, to develop a spiritual life through prayer and Bible study. The essence of the Christian's life should not just be making a living but making a life pleasing to the Lord.

B. "From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none"

1. This is a very difficult verse to interpret. What does Paul mean? Should we neglect our wives, divorce our mates, leave our spouses and go to the mission field because the time is fleeting by? No, what Paul is saying is that married people have to keep things in proper focus. The husband and wife are not to live for themselves, but for Christ and serve Him the best they can in spite of distractive responsibilities that come with marriage. There are higher demands and greater challenges than just maintaining a marriage.
2. God has placed a man and a woman together so they can serve Christ together. Therefore, Christian couples are not to let all the things the world around them lives for become the center of their lives. As Christians in a marriage, we must get the right attitude about material things, occupying our minds with spiritual and eternal matters rather than worldly matters.

C. "Those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep."

1. Paul's advice is that it is not good to get wrapped up in the affairs of this world which will hinder our fellowship with Christ and our obedience to God's will, weeping, rejoicing and buying are all legitimate and necessary aspects of life, but the highest good is one's service to Jesus Christ.
2. There are multitudes of Christians who had real spiritual zeal for Christ in their single state but after they were married, they became bogged down with children, home, jobs, paying bills or whatever and lost that zeal. Surely marriage and children will change our lifestyles, but it should not change our zeal for service to Christ.

D. "Those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."

1. The KJV says, "Those who use the world, but do not abuse it." Christians must learn how to live in the world and yet not be an intimate part of the world system. The thing of the world should never engross and possess the Christian to the point where he or she is unable to serve Jesus Christ. The things of the world are temporary, transitory and are passing away. They have absolutely no eternal value. That which is of eternal value is service for Jesus Christ. Success in business is not the greatest aim of life and should never be allowed to be so for a believer because the fame and the glory of the world is passing away.
2. Surely there is more to Christianity than owning a lovely home, slaving for a retirement plan and cramming our twilight years with a few activities we may enjoy before we die. Christians, if we do not have time to get all the worthwhile enjoyments and pleasures here and now, we will have lots of time to get them in eternity. What awaits us Christians in the future is so incredible that to give ourselves fully to the pursuit of the things of God here is much more intelligent than to waste our whole existence on secondary levels of activity and involvement.

III. SINGLEHOOD TO MORE EFFECTIVELY SERVE CHRIST 7:32-35

- A. *“I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord.”*
1. The third reason Paul says it is better to stay single is to be free from concern (anxiety). The single person has less to distract him or her from the service of the Lord.
 2. Singlehood makes possible a degree of dedication, devotion, and commitment to the work of Christ that married life does not allow. The unmarried have the potential to wait upon the Lord without distractions. They can give the majority of their time and thought to the things of Jesus Christ.
- B. *“But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided.”*
1. The married man actually has a divided interest. He wants to please the Lord and he wants to please his wife. Both are legitimate, God-given pursuits.
 2. The married man has obligations he must discharge and this demands some attention to the things of the world. In fact, the married man has the potential to get all wrapped up in worldly pursuits to care for his wife and family and forget his higher responsibility of service to Christ. This can be devastating to the spiritual life of a man.
- C. *“An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs; her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband.”*
1. The unmarried woman can serve the Lord better because she has fewer distractions. She is set apart (devoted) in body and spirit to more complete service to Christ.
 2. The married woman must divide her attention between Christ, husband and children and this is the right thing to do.
- D. *“I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*
1. What Paul had to say about the advantages of singlehood were not to discourage the singles at Corinth, but to encourage them. Paul was giving advice he thought was best for singles. Yet, he did not want to put them in a noose or straight jacket and they were perfectly free to choose the life they wanted to live, whether married or unmarried.
 2. Most singles, men and women, really struggle with the idea of being single for life. Yet, when they do understand this is God’s choice for them, they become grateful to the Lord, find a new peace and determination for service for Christ. In the single state, they discover that Christ can meet their loneliness, for singles are alone, but they are never alone because God is with them. Single Christians should not grumble about their state, nor should they pout with the “woe is me” blues, but they should give themselves to the service of Christ. Look at the apostle Paul. He was single.
 3. Because he had no distractions, he was able to move all over the Roman Empire. Out of his complete dedication and devotion to Christ, he changed the world through his preaching and letter writing. Remember, even Jesus Christ was a single person; therefore, we know that God has a very special plan for the single person who is dedicated to Him.

Occasionally I would ask my son, Dean, who was single until over 30, if there was a woman in his life. His response was something like this, “I would

like there to be, but so far God has not brought her. In fact, dad, I'm having the time of my life serving Christ. I'm making an impact for Christ in the city of Chattanooga, and marriage might hinder my ability to serve Christ with undistracted devotion. Dad, please pray God will keep me sexually pure and I will not yield to the temptations of the flesh and the wiles of the devil."

IV. SINGLEHOOD AND WIDOWS 7:39-40

- A. *"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord."*
1. A widow is free to marry the husband of her choice although she must marry a Christian. An old Puritan said, "If you marry a child of the devil, you will be sure to have trouble with your father-in-law." When we marry an unbeliever as a Christian, there is really no possibility of true oneness.
 2. A widow (or widower) facing her declining years, if she senses a great loneliness and needs companionship, she can remarry in good conscience, but she must not marry just anyone out of loneliness. She must marry a Christian and preferable a Spirit-filled Christian.
- B. *"In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God."*
1. If a widow (or widower) stays single, which Paul thinks is the happier state, she has more time to serve and please the Lord.
 2. Many times widows and widowers admit that the second marriage was a mistake, although sometimes the second marriage is a real blessing.

My wife Carol and I have agreed that when one of us dies, the other has our blessing to remarry again. Carol often says she will not remarry. There are too many things she wants to do for Christ and things she wants to see and experience. Marriage she feels could keep her from spending time with her children and grandchildren. However, I have jokingly told Carol if she dies on Friday and we bury her on Monday, I will be looking for a new mate on Thursday. I do not think I'm cut out to be a single person but no one knows until the time comes.

V. CONCLUSION

- A. A single person must have the gift of celibacy. *"I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1 Cor. 7:7).* This involves control over one's sex drives, so as to avoid sexual immorality.
- B. The gift of celibacy may be temporary. A person may have it for 5 or 10 years and then choose to get married. C.S. Lewis did not get married until he was 60 years old.
- C. A single person can serve the Lord more effectively than a married person. The issue is not moral superiority or higher spirituality, but a matter of time and undivided attention to Christ and His kingdom.

- D. Never think a single person strange, odd or perverted. Never call a single person an “old maid” or a weird bachelor,” for he or she may bring glory to God in a way that no married person every could. It is no disgrace to be single.
- E. There is no spiritual advantage in being single over being married—both are gifts from God. However, the Roman Catholics and others have taken the single state to be a morally and spiritually higher position than the marriage state. Priests and nuns take the vow not to marry for this very reason. It may interest you to note that the celibacy of the priesthood was made mandatory under Pope Gregory VII in 1079 AD. An unmarried priesthood has no biblical or historical support. However, for some Christians to stay unmarried is to their advantage. Yet, the single state has nothing to do with spirituality, but the use of time.
- F. Some of the best Christians of all times have been single men and women: The Apostle Paul, St. Augustine, Robert Murray McCheyne, Florence Nightingale, Henrietta Mears, John R.W. Stott, Bill Gothard and many others.
- G. Single people need to be treated as real people. They have many unique needs and they desperately need the love of the body of Christ.

In my church in Roanoke, we had quite a few singles, but we could not integrate them into our church. Finally, a couple in our church had a burden for the singles ministry and they began to minister effectively to them. The church started a program called “Adopt a Single” where every single was assigned to a family in the church. These families took the singles in as if they were one of the family. This program was a great success. Today Carol and I still have direct contact with the singles we adopted—one is now married and the other is not.

- H. In the USA today there are almost 50 million singles and the philosophy of most is, “live it up; swing as much as possible; do your own thing; live with gusto, and have sex without the responsibilities of marriage.” God has some very serious and sobering thoughts for the modern day single. He says, “*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*” (Heb. 13:4). God highly honors the single state, but He hates all sexual immorality
- I. Are you single? Have you involved yourself in activities that displease the Lord and which stir His wrath? There is forgiveness. There is hope for a better kind of life. There is power to cope with sex drives. Jesus Christ died for sin and sinners. No matter how rank your sin, whether it be gross immorality or sins of the mind, Jesus Christ forgives sinful people and places His eternal love upon them. Trust Christ and He will wipe your sinful slate clean, making you a new creation in Christ.