

Introduction: we have been focusing on the Christian family over the last several months as ordained by the Lord as an ordinary means to accomplish His purpose. I have sought to lay out the general principles of the blessings of marriage and children.

- This week we come to the subject of the Christian single. There are very divergent views regarding the single person from one extreme to the other. In Roman Catholicism someone is more spiritually dedicated to the Lord in the vow of chastity when they become a nun or a priest. On the other hand, within some Christian churches and ministries there is an opposite tendency. Being single is almost a curse, and one who does not desire a spouse and children is considered to be seriously warped or confused. Here, as in all things, we want to make sure that we are informed by the Word of God.
- By single I mean simply unmarried. This could refer to someone who is just coming into marriageable age, an older single, someone who is divorced, a single parent, or someone widowed (male or female) . There may also be some application to those who are legally married, but who is separated from spouse in body and soul.

### I. The Gift of Christian Singleness

- The most focused portion of Scripture on this subject is found in 1Corinthians 7.
- vv.7-9 after discussing the question about marriage and sexual obligation within marriage, Paul turns to discuss being single. He states a surprising thing, that he wishes that all men were single as himself. From v.8-9 it appears that what he is referring to is his being single.
- The big question is whether this should be taken to mean only and simply that. Is it his desire that there be no families, and thus no children within the Christian church? To do so would seem to undermine what he himself says in other places, as well as other portions of Scripture.
- But we shouldn't say that it means nothing. It is a very strong statement, and if anything he is speaking about what he considers to be the blessing of singleness as he is serving in it. The thrust of the statement is that all men who are single who be as him, that is content and happy to serve the Lord as a single man.
- In the next part of the verse he speaks of it as a gift from God, which varies according to people. He realizes that not all will be content, and for motives including sexual purity they will desire to seek a wife. Both marriage and singleness are viewed as gifts.
- What we see is that being single by choice is not necessarily a sin, as it was certainly not for the apostle.
- At this point he picks up the topic of marriage, divorce, children, and contentment in the condition in which God calls someone to become a Christian. He picks up the specific topic of singleness again in vv.25ff.

### Paul gives six reasons for remaining single (MacArthur):

#### (1) The pressure of the present distress [modified] (vv. 25–27)

- a big question is whether he is speaking of a distress that was particular in their situation, (i.e. persecution) or something that is always true spiritually as believers in this world. I lean toward the first.

#### (2) The problems of the flesh (v. 28)

- Paul recognizes that being married brings trouble to the flesh, a kind of trouble he would spare them.
- We might be inclined to say that if it is a problem with the flesh, that is even more indication someone should get married to deal with their sin. But Paul doesn't. If a person's desire and love for another person isn't sufficient to move them in willingness to overcome those difficulties in love, then it is asking for a disaster to move on anyway.

#### (3) The passing of the world (vv. 29–31)

- The emphasis in these verses seems to be Paul's recognition that marriage is a temporary institution and not permanent. The present form of this world, including our present relationships in marriage and family, will pass away (Mt22:30).

#### (4) The preoccupations of marriage (32–35)

- Here Paul spells out that the married person does and should be concerned for the things of the world, how to please the husband or wife.
- But here notice something very important. The alternative is not selfishness and self-centeredness, but rather a closer attention and commitment in serving the Lord.

#### (5) The promises of fathers (vv. 36–38)

- This is a notoriously difficult passage, but one interpretation is the Christian father's struggle with a commitment he has made on behalf of his unmarried daughter for her to remain single.

#### (6) The permanency of marriage (vv. 39–40)

- In this last section, there is the reminder that marriage is a lifelong commitment. We remember Jesus' call in regards to the Gospel to "count the cost." Likewise, the one who is to marry should come in with the realization that marriage is ordinarily permanent until death.

- In much shorter form Jesus says a similar thing in Mt19:12 "...and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*."

- I suggest that the proper language is not normal/abnormal, but ordinary/extraordinary.

- If you can be single with contentment and joy and sexual purity, then you have a gift from the Lord that is a blessing. As the church, we should recognize and honor, and even implicitly treat as if abnormal.

## **II. Particular Temptations of the Christian Single**

- Every condition of life, and every calling, has temptations and sins. Here are a few that are common among singles.

### **1.) Isolation/selfishness**

- Proverbs 18:1 A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.
- This is one of the dangers, which can lead to a lack of spiritual relationships and accountability.
- The remedy is to recognize a part of the gift is the opportunity to serve Christ without the distraction and encumbrances of married life. You can have opportunities to serve in the church and in the world in ways that married people can't because of legitimate responsibilities.
- You can pursue special opportunities to serve Christ in fields where it would be difficult with a family. Missions, volunteer work, as well as “secular” vocations that would be difficult to excel in with a family without neglect of them.
- You can pursue special opportunities of serving Christ in the local church. You could go to the deacons and ask if there are any ways that you may be of service.
- You can pursue special opportunities of serving families. Babysitting, home projects, etc. This will necessitate your seeking to spend time with them and looking for ways to serve.
- These things can help prepare, for the one who desires it, marriage and children.

### **2.) Loneliness/depression**

- There are some that can stay in that condition and be okay without a marriage partner.
- Those who earnestly desire to be married, can feel the loneliness and begin to stew in self-pity. Being around families becomes a painful thing, and so this itself can lead to isolation.

### **3.) Discontentment/covetousness**

- Closely connected to the above is an increasing desire and discontentment, and a temptation to sin in compromise in marrying someone who will not be good for them. They begin to look for love in all the wrong places, women finding a man who will not lead, men finding a woman who is more worldly than spiritually minded, or not even a Christian.
- The biblical help for this is found in places like Heb13:5. Learning to increase in love and contentment in God.

### **4.) Anger/bitterness**

- At some point, these things can escalate and cause one just to have a bitterness and anger at God and other people who are happy. I know of one case where a man was angry at the church leadership because they never set him up with a woman.
- I would point you to the example of the Lord Jesus who served in that capacity with love, service to God, contentment, and joy.

## **III. Responsibilities of the Church to Christian Singles**

- The church's response is often to collect together singles as a special group. This can be helpful in forging friendships and engaging in activities that they enjoy. But there should be something more.
- Psalms 68:6 God sets the solitary in families. I think this is true in two ways. One is that He sets them there in marriage. The other is that families take a loving interest in and concern about them, and seek to serve them by bringing them into their own family setting.
- This is to get to know them, learn how to be sensitive to their needs. This can be a particularly helpful things for college students, single parents, and widows/widowers. We don't want them to be “the forgotten” among us, forgetting the great struggle that comes in loneliness.
- Singles, if others are stirred to take such an interest, I wouldn't want you to despise them because you think they are treating you as a charity case or just feeling pity out of duty. Rather, do accept such hospitality, and see it as a way you can not only be served (thus humbling that sense of independence) and to serve.
- There are also those who may have family, but they are not Christian. There is a kind of spiritual loneliness even while being surrounded by parents and siblings.
- I want our church to be a place where singles do not feel they are 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens, just waiting around until they reach their ultimate goal of marriage. This is my concern with some of the “family-integrate”/centered ministries and churches where the focus is only on the “ideal.”
- We should also instruct our children in these truths, saying “if God gives you a spouse” with the recognition that God may give them the gift of singleness to serve Him in ways we may not prefer. We will be challenged with our desires to see grandchildren vs. the possibility that they will serve the Lord in a special way.