Singleness and Pursuing Marriage:
A Biblical View of Singleness

I. INTRODUCTION

I think this is going to be a good class. I know that these issues are more difficult to talk about than some, but don’t be too anxious. We aren’t going to single people out and make them talk about uncomfortable things. At the end of the time, we will put names in hats and start drawing them out to pair people up, but other than that it shouldn’t be too awkward ...

This morning we’re going to start out by talking about singleness. We’ll get to the pursuing marriage part soon, but there are a couple of reasons that we’re starting out with singleness. The first is chronological. Everyone starts out single. I’ve known some people who started dating and even gotten married really young, but nobody does it from day one. So it makes sense to start here. The second reason we want to talk about singleness is because there are so many unhelpful and unbiblical views of singleness outside and inside the church.

For some, singleness is this semi-tragic and terrifying in between period. The goal is just to survive it without losing your virtue or your faith. You can’t really live until you settle down and get married, so there is a rush to the altar. What’s wrong with this perspective? No doubt, it can be difficult to be single. It wasn’t too long ago I was a single man wanting to get married. It can be difficult. But this perspective misses the fact that there are some real benefits to being single. In fact, the Bible describes singleness as something more than just a waiting period.

For others, singleness is great because it is the time we get to focus on what really matters—having fun and getting ahead in our careers. So people will plan out their life and it’s graduate from college, establish your career, finish up grad school, date around, travel, and enjoy your freedom, and then maybe think about marriage. What’s wrong with this perspective? There is nothing wrong with traveling or going to grad school. But this view of singleness falls short of the Biblical view too. It reveals a skewed sense of priorities. Under this view, careers
and fun are more important than marriage and children. In reality, I think it is true that the most important work most of us will ever do is in our families.

Of course, in each of these views, there is a gain of truth. Marriage is something most people should strive toward. Furthermore, singleness lets us do things—valuable things—that are more difficult in marriage. So we need to cut through the confusion with a biblical theology of singleness.

II. TWO KINDS OF SINGleness

The first thing we need to realize is that there are two kinds of singleness in the Bible. We’re going to be in 1 Corinthians 7 a fair bit this morning, so go ahead and turn there. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul is basically addressing the issue of whether people should get married or not. It seems he’s addressing a church that is suffering persecution or perhaps undergoing economic distress, so his response is nuanced. **Would someone read 1 Corinthians 7:7-9 aloud?**

1 Corinthians 7:7-9 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. 8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. 9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

**What are the two kinds of singleness we see here?** There are some people who are single just because they’re not married yet. They have a temporary gift of singleness and then they hope marriage. But there are others who have permanent singleness as a gift from God. They’re in pretty illustrious company. Paul includes himself in that category, “I wish that all were as I myself am.” Our Lord Jesus had the gift of singleness.

Now I think a lot of young Christian men at some point ask whether they have the gift of singleness. I’ve had conversations about this. They look at me and their mouths say, “I’m thinking I might have the gift of singleness” but their eyes are saying, “I’m thinking I might have the curse of singleness.” **How can we know if someone has the gift of singleness? What criteria does Paul give us right here?** He says it is better to marry than to burn with passion. I think Paul is telling us
that the gift of singleness involves the ability to control sexual desire. So if you
don’t think that describes you, you don’t have the gift of singleness.

**Why does Paul call singleness a gift?** First, because it is something we receive
from God. It isn’t just a withholding of blessing, it is something God gives.
Second, he calls it a gift because there are tremendous advantages to singleness.
You can do things as a single man or woman that you can’t do as a married
person. Look down in 1 Corinthians 7 to vv. 32-38. **Would someone read vv. 32-38?**

1 Corinthians 7:32-38  

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The
unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the
Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please
his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed
woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and
spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to
please her husband. 35 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. 36 ¶ If anyone thinks that he is not
behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it
has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry--it is no sin. 37 But
whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but
having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to
keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. 38 So then he who marries his
betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even
better.

Paul says that the interests of married people are divided (v. 34) and have
additional anxiety. **How are they divided?** Married people have to give time,
energy and attention to their spouses. Of course, that is a good thing! But it also
means that they can’t devote all of their time directly to the Lord. I think
everyone who is married knows what this is all about. I can’t spend all night in a
dorm room talking about spiritual things because I need to spend time with my
family. I can’t sell all my possessions and begin an itinerant preaching ministry
tomorrow because I have a family. I have these serious responsibilities. God
gives some people a gift of singleness that enables them to serve the Lord with undivided attention and interest.

So we see from this text that singleness is actually good. Some people have a short term gift of singleness. They probably shouldn’t let it drag on very long, but they should take advantage of it while it lasts. Others have a lifelong gift of singleness. They should use that too. **So let me ask you, what should Christians do with their singleness? And how should we counsel our friends to think about singleness?**

III. HOW TO USE YOUR SINGleness: Preparation

Let me suggest two ways we should use singleness. The first is to prepare for marriage. Obviously, this doesn’t apply to that small percentage of people who may be single for life in order to serve the Lord. But most people will want to pursue marriage, so they should take advantage of singleness to prepare.

**What are some ways Christians can use singleness to prepare for marriage?**

- Growth in godliness. Become the kind of Christian you would want to marry. You’ll need resources of patience and love and self-control in marriage. It’s tough to develop them in the hour of need. Build them now.
- Learn from godly marriages. Some of you might have parents with marriages that are worth emulating. Learn from them. But everyone should know Christians who have exemplary marriages. Spend time with those people and get to know them.
- Prepare yourself to provide. This one is particularly for the men. Proverbs 24:27 says “Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house.” I think more is in view than physical construction of a house—it’s a household. You need to have a means of providing food, clothing, and shelter for a family.
- Develop skills that will come in handy in your role as husband and wife. Household management, financial planning, we could go on. Grow in those skills.

IV. HOW TO USE YOUR SINGleness: Ministry
I want to suggest a second way you should use your singleness—ministry. This really is the one that Paul focuses on in 1 Corinthians 7. Some single people are anxious to please themselves. Some people even stay single so they can devote themselves more fully to meeting their own need and fulfilling their personal goals. But Paul tells us that “The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord ... And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit.” He’s obviously not saying that single Christians are all like that. He’s saying that they should be like that. This is a goal for single Christians to strive toward.

**What does it look like to be “anxious about the things of the Lord”?** It certainly involves personal devotion and piety. But it also involves ministry to others.

**What are some ways single Christians can engage in ministry more effectively than married Christians?** Paul is really offering himself up for a model here. Think about the kind of life he led. Often in prison. Shipwrecked, beaten, stoned near to death, ill, and so on. Always on the move. That’s tough to do if you have to make sure the kids make it to T-Ball practice. Or, for that matter, if you have to make sure the kids starve to death. Don’t be afraid to take some risks for the gospel. Use your singleness.

Singles can minister to other singles more naturally. They can live in dorms packed with unbelievers and share the gospel. They can go on summer long mission trips. They can give a larger percentage of their income to the church and to missions. They can encourage and invest in other families. We could go on and on.

V. CONCLUSION

So that brings us to the end of our brief look at singleness. There is obviously a lot more we can say. Most of us have to do some enduring of singleness. But I think we can say something more. Singleness for all of us is a gift from God. For some, it’s a more permanent gift. But singleness is meant to be used. Be using your singleness now.

**Any questions about anything we’ve talked about?**
Matthew 19:12  12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

1 Corinthians 9:5  5 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?