

BIBLICAL SINGLENESS | *An Overview of 1 Corinthians 7*

I. SINGLES ARE NOT ALL THE SAME

There are many stages to single adult life, just as there are many stages to married adult life. Therefore, whatever is said from the pulpit about singleness is guaranteed to encourage some and offend many. A single woman in her forties with a demanding career and the responsibilities of caring for her elderly parents is not equivalent to a recent college grad who is still living at home. Both are unmarried, but chances are, the older single woman has more in common with the parents of the single college grad than with the single college grad them self. It is also vitally important that unmarried men and women are discipled as men and women and not a generic lump of singles. Scripture places its primary emphasis on being made a man or a woman in the image of God, with a secondary emphasis on marital status. Unmarried men and women are no less masculine or feminine because of their singleness. It is a mistake to solely define spiritual masculinity as being a husband and a father. If this is the case then Jesus was not masculine.

"Bible masculinity is defined as the joyful acceptance of sacrificial responsibility."

-Douglas Wilson

2 Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2 ESV

II. SINGLENESS IS A GIFT

Almost everything in our society is structured around couples. So much so, that many people think there is something wrong with them if they don't have a partner. This negative view of singleness has been around for a long time. In the first century, Rabbi Eleazar said, "Any man who has no wife is no proper man." The Talmud went even further by saying, "The man who is not married at 20 is living in sin." Given that background, it is surprising how positive the New Testament is about singleness. We must not fall into the trap of believing that singleness is second best.

6 Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. 7 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.

1 Corinthians 7:6-7 ESV

However, many of us may be tempted to think, "What if I don't have the 'gift' of singleness? It's difficult being on my own and I earnestly desire to be married." However, when Paul speaks of singleness as a gift, he is not speaking of a particular ability that some individuals possess to be contentedly single. Rather, he is speaking of the state of being single. As long as you are single, your singleness is a gift from God with a purpose.

The Apostle Paul mentions two advantages to singleness. The first is that those who are single will experience less troubles in this life. Christian couples do not often talk openly about the difficult things they face, which can give singles a rose-tinted view of marriage. There is a downside even when a married couple's relationship is good: life is more complicated. In marriage, there is now more than one person to consider, and children serve only to complicate things even more. Marriage undoubtedly brings "many troubles in this life" and as Paul says, he wants "to spare you this." Secondly, singles have been given more time to serve the Lord. A huge part of the Christian responsibility for married individuals is to care for their spouse and children. This requires a lot of time. Single people have much more time to give to other things. Most single people have not deliberately chosen singleness, and yet, they have the same advantages as those who have. Instead of focusing on the difficulties of being single, they must make the most of the advantages of God's gift of singleness for as long as they have it.

28 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.

1 Corinthians 7:28 ESV

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. The unmarried 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 benefit, not to lay restraint upon you, but to promote good order and secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.
1 Corinthians 7:32-35 ESV

III. SINGLENES IS A FORM OF SUFFERING

When God saw Adam on his own in the Garden of Eden, he said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Although the New Testament is positive about singleness, there is no doubt that marriage is regarded as the biblical norm for humanity. It is God's loving gift to humanity and the chief context in which our desire for intimacy and companionship is met in this life. Single people are therefore likely to struggle with loneliness and the temptation to lust to a significantly higher degree than those who are married. These two battles are closely related. The lonelier we are, the more likely we are to struggle with lust. We were not designed to be on our own. If we are not to be married, whether in the short or long term, we should proactively seek to satisfy our need for intimacy in other appropriate relationships found in the church. Extended singleness is a form of suffering. There is an appropriate time for mourning with those who mourn. This is especially true for women who see the window of fertility closing on them without the hope of bearing children. We must be careful not to minimize the difficulty of years of dashed hopes for unmarried adults.

IV. SINGLENES WILL NOT LAST FOREVER

No Christian will remain single forever. Human marriage reflects the marriage that Jesus wants to enjoy with his people forever. The Bible speaks of Jesus as the Bridegroom who will one day return to take his Bride, the Church, to be with him in the perfect new creation. On that day all pain will disappear, including the pain of singleness. In essence, the entire Christian life is nothing more than preparation for marriage.

V. SINGLES MUST DATE RIGHTEOUSLY (*For Your Own Personal Study*)

The Bible says a lot about 'how' to have a good marriage, but very little about 'who' to marry. The only tip we are given is that the person we marry must be a Christian. However, being a Christian includes a lot of things. For instance, one of the most important marks of a Christian is repentance. The world says that we should search for a relationship where we do not have to change, where we are accepted for exactly who we are. However, the Bible says that the willingness and ability to change is the only way we can ever sustain a real relationship.

14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?
2 Corinthians 6:14 ESV

Godly dating does not mean that we are required to marry the first person we ever ask out to coffee. It simply means that we are a good steward of whatever relationships we have been given. We should do our very best to build up the person we are dating for as long as we are with them, and then return them to God with thankfulness in our hearts. In order for our dating to be godly, it does not have to end in marriage. However, as soon as one of the individuals in the dating relationship determines that they do not desire to marry the person they are dating, in love for that person, they must immediately end the dating relationship. What makes dating godly, is that it exemplifies the purity that Christ has given us, it displays the integrity that causes us not to lead one another on, and it results with both individuals looking more like Jesus if and when the relationship ends.