



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Title: The Single Life

Date: April 21, 2024
Passage: 1 Corinthians 7:17-40

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 7:17-40

The past two weeks we have been walking through this chapter and looking at questions revolving around relationships. We talked about sexual intimacy in marriage; we talked about divorce and some cultural things the people of Corinth were struggling with; now today we are going to talk about singleness. Last week I gave a disclaimer and I'll begin that way again today. I know that some of you have a great desire to be married and life has just not worked out that way for you. When we've been discussing this chapter there are places Paul says, "If you want to be married, get married." Or, "It's better to marry than to burn with desire." And yet, it's not always that easy. So, as we discuss this today I am aware that the subject of being single can be really hard for you in the same type of way that Mother's Day or Father's Day can be hard for couples who struggle with infertility although the desire of their heart is to have children. And yet, there is a way to live in this aspect of your life where we are all called to make Jesus our highest priority and to live in obedience to Him regardless of the life situation we find ourselves in.

In fact, that's where we ended last week and where we will pick up this week. Before we talk about singleness specifically, there is another conversation Paul has with the Church in Corinth about what it looks like to follow Jesus in whatever station of life you are in.

:: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

17 Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.

19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

20 Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you – although if you can gain your freedom, do so.

22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings.

24 Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

Paul starts out by simply saying, "Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them..." In a culture that was heavily divided over identity: men and women, Jew and Gentile, Slave and Free, the Church of Jesus brought radically different views and approaches to life as followers of Jesus.

In the first century as the church was getting started, it's important to remember that the earliest converts to Christianity were Jews. But when Gentiles started receiving Christ some really challenging conversations came up. There were those who believed that Christianity and Judaism were so deeply linked that to be Christian you had to convert to Judaism...and all that entailed- following the Law of Moses, being circumcised if you were a male and keeping Jewish traditions.

But in Acts 15 we read about how this conflict was argued and resolved by the apostles and elders.

:: Acts 15:1-21

15 Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.

4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.

7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

8 God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

9 He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?

11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

13 When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me.

14 Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.

15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

**16 “After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.**

**Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,**

**17 that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things’ –**

18 things known from long ago.

19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

20 Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

21 For the law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

Through the death of Jesus on the cross, the way was made for all mankind to be in relationship with God and to be united to one another through grace- not through obedience to the Law of Moses! The early church leaders would say:

The change that happens in the heart is what matters- not a change of status or position.

So Paul gives the Corinthians some things not to worry about as they turn to follow Jesus.

:: 1 Corinthians 7:18-24

18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised.

19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

20 Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.

22 For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave.

23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings.

24 Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

Were you Jewish when you were called? Stay Jewish!

Were you Gentile when you were called? Stay a Gentile!

- Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing- only keeping God's commands is what counts!

Then Paul is going to address another group: Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you- although if you can gain your freedom, do so. In the Roman empire there was those who were slaves by force because they were conquered people. There were also people who were slaves, or bond servants, by choice as a way to pay off debt or to move into a better financial situation as a worker. It was not uncommon in Rome for doctors to be slaves, lawyers to be slaves, musicians to be slaves, artists to be slaves- some historians believe up to 50% of people in the Roman Empire had the term "slave" attached to them, or bond servant.

- The thought process was, "I can't be effective as a follower of Jesus if I'm not Jewish." Yes, you can!
- "I can't be effective as a follower of Jesus if I'm not free." Yes, you can! In fact, you might lead your slave owner to faith in Christ and help many find freedom as you become a brother to the one who you once called "master."

Your status doesn't determine your commitment to Christ or your ability to share His love. We are all called to make disciples of Jesus and our position in life doesn't disqualify us from that. Later in Paul's life he will be a prisoner in chains and will lose his freedom. But in that setting he writes to the churches telling them that many of the guards he was chained to became followers of Jesus because of his testimony to them!

This brings us back to the question we asked last week:

"Is Jesus enough?"

No matter what you have or don't have in life, no matter your circumstances or situation, is Jesus enough for you? If you lost everything you had tomorrow, would Jesus be enough for you?

That leads us to the next conversation Paul is going to have for the people in the church- he is going to address the issue of being single.

:: 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

25 Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

26 Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

27 Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife.

28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

29 What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not;

30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep;

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

32 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.

33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—

34 and his interests are divided. 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.

35 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.

36 If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.

37 But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing.

38 So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.^[c]

**³⁹ 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.
⁴⁰ In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.**

Verses 25-28 Talking Points:

Virgins- also Young Women; remember, we are in Corinth and there may be young women who have come to faith in Christ who are not married, but are also not sexual virgins.

“I have no command from the Lord...” Jesus did not address this issue in His ministry or Paul is unaware of any teaching by Jesus on this topic, but he is not making up things from his own opinion, he is being led by the Spirit to write in wisdom.

Present crisis: We are not entirely sure what Paul means here, but it’s possible that he is addressing persecution against Christians or just the wickedness that comes from being part of the culture. Regardless, as Paul is looking at this specific situation, he seems to think that remaining single in that time was a good strategy!

- This also seems to be something Paul addresses specifically in Corinth. In other letters we have from Paul he gives instructions about marriage and the roles of husband or wife. But with the people in Corinth he continually says singleness is preferable. Marriage isn’t sinful- in fact, marriage was given to us before the fall, but singleness is a good option if you can manage it!
- Why? Those who marry face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this! (vs. 28)
- For those of you who are single and desire to get married, make sure you have a proper view of marriage! It’s not all sunshine and rainbows. Paul wants you to simply be aware, especially the younger you are, that marriage will put you through the ringer! My pastor used to say, “Marriage is bliss..and sometimes blisters!”
 - Some people get married thinking that will complete them. If you are not content in your singleness, there’s a really strong chance you won’t find contentment in marriage. God didn’t design your spouse to complete you. Adam was alone in the garden, he wasn’t incomplete!
 - **In marriage 1 and 1 become 1, not ½ and ½.**

Illustration: Heather and me at SLCamp early in our marriage where we realized that we couldn’t fully fulfill or complete each other. God had to be the center of our marriage and we had to be fulfilled in Him and by Him.

Verses 29-31 Talking Points:

This section seems a little difficult to understand- especially verse 29, so let’s try to make sense of it.

Paul is not saying that we should abandon our marriage and pretend like we are not married or give no attention to our spouses.

- The time is short- we are to live with great anticipation of the return of Christ. So don't hold on too tightly to your spouse- that's a temporary situation- remember, there is no marriage in heaven. Read Matthew 22:23-33 for more of Jesus's teachings on that topic.
- If you are mourning, it's going to pass
- If you are joyful, don't get too used to it- harder days may come
- If you have lots of possessions, don't get too attached to them
 - Why? The world in its present form is passing away. The time is short- live for what's eternal!
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If you're single and wanting to be married, that's good- but don't make it your god!

Verses 32-35 Talking Points:

There are benefits of a single lifestyle when it comes to the work of the Kingdom.

- Your concerns are for the Kingdom
 - You can take off and go any time, anywhere God calls you.
 - Your schedule is yours without worrying what a spouse thinks.

I love being married, but there are things I would absolutely be able to do differently in my life if I didn't have a wife and kids. As it is, we have to fight for our schedules to align. I'm also not just free to make decisions on my own- I want to make sure my wife is on board with things I'm doing.

Illustration: Potential trip to overseas.

Paul doesn't say these things are bad, they just divide your focus from Kingdom work in a way that single people do not have to worry about.

This is also not to say that your marriage can't be focused on Kingdom work and bring glory to God! In fact, you should be honoring God through your marriage and working to make room for ministry together as a husband/wife/family. Again, this world is temporary, so do things that have eternal impact.

Verses 36-40 Talking Points:

If you marry you are doing the right thing!

If you don't marry you are doing the right thing! In Paul's mind, at least for the Corinthians, you are doing a better thing!

And if you have a spouse who dies, the marriage covenant is completed and you are free to marry- assuming the person is a believer- but you may be happier if you stay single! It's right to marry. It's right to stay unmarried.

Let's close with something Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13:

:: Philippians 4:12-13

12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Lean in to God's strength for whatever situation you find yourself in and remember that your life is designed to bring glory to God and to shine light on His Kingdom no matter your circumstances!

- Pray