

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 2: Purity and the Gospel

Purity in Circumstance

1 Corinthians 7:17-40

Introduction

ILLUS: The challenge, anxiety, and stress of finding “the one.”

In this section on Purity and the Gospel, we have looked at Purity in the Church, in Conflict, the Body, and Marriage. Today we will be looking at Purity in our Circumstance.

The requirement for remaining Pure in our Circumstances is contentment.

Philippians 4:11–13 (NIV) — **11** I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. **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.

“Bottom line: God knows where you are, and he can use you where you are.” (Akin & Merritt, 149)

Requires Contentment in Our Social Situation (17-24)

These verses comprise a section that ties God's instruction for both those who are married and those who are single together. Essentially God's desire is for both is that they remain and are content in whatever their current circumstance happens to be.

This is summarized in verse 20

1 Corinthians 7:20 (NKJV) — 20 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.

And repeated in verse 24

1 Corinthians 7:24 (NKJV) — 24 Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

It may seem, at face value, Paul is commanding people to remain in the circumstance they were when they were saved until they die.

However, we know that is not the case for several reasons. Paul didn't stay in the same circumstance he was in when he was saved. Also, as we will see a little later, he even encourages a change in circumstance when God providentially provides the opportunity.

No, there is much more nuance to this teaching than what can appear to be simple command which has no sympathy regarding one's circumstance.

Paul knows that in this life there are seasons of circumstances. His encouragement is no matter the

circumstance we find ourselves in, we are to be fully present because the Lord has a plan and a purpose.

ILLUS: Being there but not being there.

In order to avoid a wrong interpretation, Paul begins with one's social situation.

Note first that regardless of one's situation, it has been distributed to each of us by God and comes with a call from Him to walk through it. This is true of all Christians in all churches.

"Distribution" is the same term that will be used later to speak of God giving believers spiritual gifts and a calling to use them for His glory.

What this means is that while your current circumstance may not be where you desire to be, it is no less a gift from God through which He has called you to walk.

"New converts to the Christian faith are often of the opinion that the only way to show gratitude for the gift of salvation is to become a minister or missionary of the gospel. This is commendable but not necessary. The Lord calls his people in all walks of life to follow him." (Kistemaker quoted by Akin & Merritt, 149)

Paul then gives us two illustrations:

Circumcision (18-19):

Circumcision:

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How would they know? Bathhouses and Athletics.

Whatever condition you were in when you come to Christ – it is not an accident, and there is a purpose God has for it. Remain there.

Remember of Paul

Philippians 3:4b–5 (NKJV) — 4b ... If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: **5** circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;

For Paul to say circumcision was nothing was a big deal!

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) — 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Now Paul moves from circumcision to slavery.

Slavery (21-22):

The Bible never condones slavery but is open in addressing it as one of the challenges in Roman society.

But even in this, Paul said if this was the believer's circumstance, not to be "concerned about it."

Galatians 3:28 (NKJV) — 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Certainly, if there is opportunity to be free do so! But your circumstance does not have to change for you to walk with and in Christ.

For us to have Purity in our Circumstance, Requires Contentment in Our Social Situation. In the same why it ...

Requires Contentment in Our Single Situation (25-40)

Paul here then begins to apply this truth back to relational purity whether one is married and now specifically to one who is single.

Again, as with verse 12, Paul notes that he cannot quote Jesus directly regarding singleness because Jesus did not address it specifically. However, because of the Spirit's inspiration on Paul's writing, we can know what he tells us is trustworthy.

Singleness brings Less Distress (25-28)¹

Note that here for the first time Paul uses the term "virgin." Understanding what he has been teaching

¹ This outline comes from Akin and Merritt in the Christ-Centered Exposition Series on 1 Corinthians (156-165)

regarding sexual immorality and the beauty of sexual intimacy within marriage, this means that he is speaking concerning one who has never been married.

He again reiterates encouragement to be present in whatever circumstance one finds themselves.

But for the single person, Paul begins a list of reasons why one should be content if God has them in a place of singleness.

The first of these is “Less Distress” or, as he states in verse 28, to spare one of trouble that is inevitable in marriage.

This is in no way to suggest marriage is bad or sinful. In fact, quite the opposite. God created and declared marriage to be “very good.” But that doesn’t mean that marriage does not come with stresses that are not present in singleness.

ILLUS: Being distressed over the care and well-being of a wife and children.

But it goes beyond that ...

Singleness has Fewer Distractions (29-31)

Paul begins this reasoning with a statement of fact, the time we have on this earth (or possibly Christ’s return) is indeed short.

This was not intended to be a discouragement but to make the point that “our time is limited” because “the world is passing away.”

Romans 13:12 (NKJV) — 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

This is a challenge that seeks to set both our perspective and priorities.

The proper perspective tells us that this world is not our home. Because of this, marriage, mourning, rejoicing, possessions, etc. are only temporary and passing away.

As a result, while these things are a part of life, they should not be the goal of or our pursuit in life.

However, in marriage, these things play a more significant role because of God’s call to the responsibilities of marriage and parenting. This of necessity leads to greater distraction that the call and gift of singleness does not require.

Singleness offers Less Distress, Fewer Distractions, and ...

Singleness offers Greater Devotion (32-35)

Simply reading the opening sentence can lead to misunderstanding. Paul is not saying that he wants a single to be at a place where they “couldn’t care less.” He is saying that being single frees one from

the devotion required in marriage so one can be more devoted to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7:32–34 (MSG) — 32 I want you to live as free of complications as possible. When you're unmarried, you're free to concentrate on simply pleasing the Master. **33** Marriage involves you in all the nuts and bolts of domestic life and in wanting to please your spouse, **34** leading to so many more demands on your attention. The time and energy that married people spend on caring for and nurturing each other, the unmarried can spend in becoming whole and holy instruments of God.

He uses the body as an illustration of this truth.
Remember in marriage ...

1 Corinthians 7:4 (NKJV) — 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Notice he says the purpose of him saying this is not cheat someone out of marriage or to restrain someone from marrying, because need to do what they are properly called to do.

However, it is a fact that singleness submitted to the Lord brings less distraction which can lead to a greater devotion.

Because singleness allows for Less Distress, Fewer Distractions, and Greater Devotion, Paul then concludes with ...

Singleness is a Better Decision (36-40)

The honest truth is that who Paul is addressing in 36-38 is just not clear. It could be a Father in relation to his daughter regarding the arranged marriages of the day.

It could also be relationship of a fiancé to his virgin bride to be.

In either case, the point remains the same. If the bride to be is mature (past the flower of youth) and the couple is called to marriage, they should marry.

However, if there is not a call to marriage (a necessity) and the God-given ability not to “burn with passion” (7:9), they should remain single.

To marry when called is to do well. To remain single when called, in relation to living for the Lord, is the better decision.

The same is true for the widow who is free to remarry because her husband has died. She is free to remarry “in the Lord,” but could be happier if the Lord called her to remain single.

The Spirit is inspiring Paul to teach us these things.

Conclusion

“Marriage is good. Singleness is good. However, there is no denying the practical advantages of the single life.” (Akin & Merritt, 163)

The greatest person to ever live was single: Jesus

The greatest mere human to ever live was single: John the Baptist

The greatest missionary and theologian to ever live was single: Paul

The greatest statesman to ever live was single: Daniel

The greatest prophets of Israel who ever lived were single: Elijah and Elisha

“God knows what he is doing when he calls people to marriage, and God knows what he is doing when he calls them to singleness. Whatever God's calling is for you, you can rejoice and be certain that it is his best for you.” (Akin & Merritt, 164)

No matter the circumstance, for the believer you don't have to find the One, He found you!

Be all there!