

# **Sermon: The Value of Being Single**

**Text: I Corinthians 7:1-11, 25-35 ESV**

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**Introduction:** The text before us is hard to outline and even harder to interpret in some areas, but we will do our best to unpack what Paul was advising and even commanding for the 1st century Church in Corinth. Paul was not opposed to being married. In the context of worship we hear: **Ephesians 5:21-23 ESV** <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Although Paul declares he is single in our text, he was almost undoubtedly married at one time. His wife may have died or have left him when he became a Christian. But for him to be a part of the Sanhedrin he would have been married. In fact, Jewish men were expected to marry and then try to produce children to obey the Lord's command to be "fruitful and multiply" (**Genesis 1:28**).

**(Story by Steven Cole)** When John Wesley was a 32-year-old missionary in Georgia, he fell in love with a beautiful 18-year-old girl. He was torn between being committed to celibacy or marrying her. A friend suggested drawing lots to discern God's will. Wesley agreed, so on one slip of paper, the friend wrote, "Marry." On another, "Think not of it this year." On the third, "Think of it no more." Wesley closed his eyes and drew out the note that read, "Think of it no more." The young woman married another man and Wesley was heartbroken.

Fifteen years later, Wesley married a wealthy widow, but the marriage was a disaster. He admitted later that he did not marry for happiness, and he did not find it. He was gone a lot and wasn't an easy man to live with. His wife eventually left him. When she later died, Wesley didn't even know she had died until after the funeral.

Sometimes ministry can get in the way of family and marriage. Teresa, once said to me, "you spend more time with the church people than your own family." OUCH!

Paul is not opposed to marriage. For many this helps keep a proper relationship with God. In **verse 2** Paul says because there is so much immorality a man should have a wife and a woman should have a husband. Things really have not changed dramatically in 2000 years in the social context in the area of sexuality and proper relationships.

**Illus.** NIV study notes – the temple to Aphrodite build high above Corinth at one time had 1000 temple prostitutes. This was a part of the Corinthians’ environment. **I Corinthians 7:1-11 ESV (Principles for Marriage)** 1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” 2 But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 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. 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. 10 To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband 11 (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.**(Jesus, Shammai, and Hillel [his grandson, Gamaliel taught Paul])**

**Illus.** If you had it to do all over again would you be married or single? Was singleness or marriage what you thought it would be? Teresa says that she would not marry again if something were to happen to me. I don’t know if I have ruined her for other men, or if I am somehow viewed as high-maintenance.

Nearly 50% of the adult world in America is single. This is a fast growing segment of our population. Any church that wants to do effective ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must evaluate what they are going to offer those who are single.

**As I see it, there are two types of singles:**

**INTENTIONAL**

Too young to marry

Do not need or want to marry

Single parents (either)

**UNINTENTIONAL**

Divorced (either group)

Widowed (short of murder)

Never found the ONE (no one good enough)

God must always take priority in every relationship or lack of relationship. Some people are out there looking for that special someone to make everything all right – BUT only God can do that.

God says it is OK to be single, if that is your gift. Paul says being single is actually a better state than marriage, ideally.

Not everyone who is single wishes they were married. Not everyone who is single is miserable. Some are very content in their lifestyle. In fact, there is clear evidence in the Bible that being single may have its advantages. Paul advises, for those who can, to remain single.

Being single helps us:

## **I. To Avoid Trouble (v. 28)**

**I Corinthians 7:28 ESV** But 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.

It is better to be single, but if you do marry, marry a Christian! Mixed marriages can cause a great deal of trouble just in the practice of one's faith. **EXPLAIN.**

“God has called us to live in peace.” (v. 15c) Don't marry someone to change them or to make them what you want them to be. “You have to love their weaknesses, too.”

I do not know specifically what Paul meant by trouble or present crisis (2nd coming or persecution). We know and the Scripture teaches that to marry the wrong individual can impact your ability to serve (minister), to worship or to pray.

One scripture that speaks to that issue is **I Timothy 3:11 ESV** as it relates to the qualifications for the office of deacon: 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Paul is basically saying: “I told you so. Don't blame me if you marry ...”

A person who is unmarried and without the personal involvement that comes with marriage can make decisions based on how they affect him or her. If a person is married he must weigh the consequences of a decision on how it might affect his family as well.

One of the first problems in marriage is holidays, i.e. at whose house are we having Thanksgiving or Christmas or birthdays? (ask the question)  
(What is another problem?)

Do we want children, how many? AND where do we want to live?

There are personality differences:  
Different standards – time, cleanliness  
Vacations, Money, Needs and wants

**Steven Cole shares:** Psychologist, William Marston once asked 300 people, “What do you have to live for?” Nine out of ten were simply waiting for something to happen—a better job, a new house, a trip, etc. They were putting in time while they waited for an uncertain tomorrow.

**I Corinthians 7:29-31 ESV** 29 This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

As Christians, our mentality should be like that. Time is short and eternity is just ahead. Our focus should be on the Lord and His kingdom. If He graciously gives you the blessings of a Christian marriage, enjoy it thankfully. But don't put your hopes for fulfillment in a family. Hope in the Lord! Whether you're single or married, your purpose should never be to seek self-fulfillment. Rather, your purpose should be to pursue a course that leads to the greatest devotion to Christ and His cause in these days that remain before His coming.

Compromise sometimes means no one is happy. Always giving into the needs or desires of your mate may build hostility, hatred, and anger.

**I Corinthians 7:32-34 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. 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.

Referring to these verses, F.F. Bruce comments (p.75-76): “The conflict of interests and cares to which Christians with family responsibilities are ordinarily subject is intensified in times of distress, and Paul wants his readers (the Church) to be free from such anxieties.”

A married person’s interests are divided unlike that of a single. Christian widows are generally good examples of undivided devotion – another reason the Church is commanded to look after her older widows especially.

Being single helps us:

**II. To Focus on God’s Needs** (undivided devotion – v. 35)

**I Corinthians 7:35 ESV** 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.

There is a sense, of course, an omnipotent God does not need anything. Paul in his presentation of the gospel in Athens on Mars Hill had made that clear: **Acts 17:24-25 ESV** 24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

But just like a parent, God enjoys seeing his children do things out of love and devotion for Him.

And the real issue is one of FOCUS. We need to see what’s important! It is really easy to become distracted in this world. There are so many options/choices and selections. Because there are so many possibilities, we **MUST PRIORITIZE**. (urgent/important)

Frank Tillapaugh’s biting critique on the church is that it has went behind closed doors and become a **FORTRESS CHURCH**. It has become a commissary for the middle-class and who are in charge of Parks and Recreation.

**Illus.** Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, won a strategic battle with comparative ease and little loss of men. When asked for the explanation of his victory over the enemy, he said, “The enemy had seven cooks and one spy, but I had seven spies and one cook.”

To win the spiritual battle of Armageddon, the cosmic battle of good and evil being waged everyday, we have to start fulfilling our mission of how we leave these walls and become salt and light – how we act as the Church.

God's heart is in evangelism. That is where the greatest needs are.

**Illus.** During the Byron Nelson Gold Tournament in Dallas in May 1981, a massive tree limb broke off and fell on a spectator, who was killed instantly. (Greene, p.63-64)

It happened near the third hole when Charles Coody was playing at the time. Shortly after the accident, Coody was interviewed on the radio and, in talking to the reporter, he said, "After running over and seeing the accident, I tried to play golf, yet I had no desire to play after that. All of a sudden, those three-foot putts didn't seem all that important. (Greene, p.291)

People are getting killed spiritually all around us. We cannot go on playing as if nothing significant has happened.

It is not that we cannot see. It is that we have lost our focus. Being single helps us focus on God and others because we have less distractions and obligations.

God's heart must break when the church puts so much effort into worship and programs and so little into evangelism and spiritual support of our members.

The words for worship in the Bible talk about bowing and serving – very little about singing with or without an instrument. All this talk about who is right and who is wrong. Let's preach, teach and share Jesus – and Him crucified – LET'S evangelize the lost and not worry about who is doing worship the right or wrong way.

Hear what Jesus says to Zacchaeus: **Luke 19:10 ESV** <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Being single helps us:

### **III. To Imitate Paul and Jesus**

**Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV** <sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**I Corinthians 4:16-17 ESV** <sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

**Luke 6:40 ESV** <sup>40</sup> A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

There is ample evidence that we are called to imitate (mimic) those who are holy.

Paul and Jesus' legacy is not material, BUT SPIRITUAL.

If you are married and you have children and all you ever give your children are things, you will have left them nothing valuable when you die.

Paul and Jesus did not own a house. Jesus said foxes have holes and birds, nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. They both died poor, but no one would say they left nothing. *Their* legacy was immeasurable. The Scripture alone is a priceless treasure.

Jesus and Paul died unmarried. Jesus never married. Both were childless – but both had spiritual children. In Paul and John's writings especially they refer to converts to Christianity as "my dear children."

Jesus was about His Father's business.

Jesus and Paul traveled a great deal from place to place. Probably the longest Paul was in one place while in ministry was about 3 years. No settling down for Paul. We ought to be a little unsettled – never too comfortable – never satisfied with the status quo always looking for a way to share Jesus.

As a bachelor or widower, Paul was free to do ministry wherever God sent him.

Jesus and Paul were not promoting celibacy and singleness in their teaching, so much, nor were they bashing marriage. They simply understood that it was less complicated and more efficient for the kingdom. The early church distorted this teaching with monasteries and cloistered groups. God is not against marriage. Simply being single is better, but as Paul tells us: not everyone has that gift.

**Conclusion:** The importance of being single or married is that it is what God wants for us. If God has called us to be single, that is not a negative situation or inferior lifestyle. **I Corinthians 7:7 ESV** <sup>7</sup>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.

According to Paul, celibacy is a gift – but it should never be commanded. In fact Paul says that such coercion would be a sign of apostasy in the end times. Single or married – neither condition is more holy than the other.

**BUT, whatever your marital status – BE ALL YOU CAN BE FOR GOD.**

**So single or married:** **Colossians 3:2 ESV** <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.