

Singleness or Marriage: Which Gift is Yours?

Intro

“Why should we spend time talking about marriage right now?”

- 1) God loves marriage
- 2) Contemporary culture belittles marriage
- 3) Your calling awaits

*Progressive movement toward marriage:
VALUE ◊ PURSUE ◊ RECEIVE*

Scripture vs. culture

- A biblical understanding of marriage has fallen out of popularity in the Church.
- The challenge, fundamentally, is to restore the place of Scripture in shaping the life and practice of the Church.

Aloneness, marriage, & the creation mandate

Genesis 1.26-27

- From day 1, creation had a certain rhythm to it, with patterns that locked into place and set a pace for history.
- Among those original patterns was marriage and the establishing of families.

Gen 2.24 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

- One of the intents of this verse in Scripture is to speak to single men in this way: “Go and do likewise!” – this verse calls for application!

This marriage/family pattern was not so fixed that there were no exceptions, but it was, nonetheless, the dominant pattern. And the classic texts dealing with the exceptions to pursuing marriage only reinforce the idea that the call to celibacy (enduring singleness), though wonderfully God-glorifying, is rare.

Classic texts on the 'gift' of singleness

Jesus on singleness

Matt 19.10-12

- Some of the disciples react to Jesus' reinforcement of the permanency of marriage by saying, "Better to just stay single."
- Jesus: "Easier said than done. To live that out you need to have 'gifting' ["only those to whom it is given]."

▶ Eunuch Profiles according to Jesus

- √ A person born with deformities that make sexual union impossible can 'receive this saying' (namely that of remaining unmarried for life).
- √ A person rendered sexually handicapped at a later point in life.
- √ A person who invests his/her entire life in the gospel mission.

Paul on singleness

I Cor 7

- Without **historical context**, it may seem that Paul obliterates the dominant pattern of the creation mandate.
 1. Paul qualifies his comments by appealing to God's 'assignment'.
 - a. 7.2 – sexual wiring is a factor in deciding to marry or not. (cf. 7.5, 9, 36)
 - b. 7.7 – each one has his own gift from God (cf. 7.17)
 2. Paul qualifies his comments by linking his counsel to their local situation.
 - a. 7.6, 25 – language of *concession*: saying that remaining single, if possible, would be preferable "in view of the present distress (vs. 26, 28-31)."

"[vs. 26] This sentence begins (literally): "I think therefore this to be good because of the present crisis."

[of the word 'good'] ... "this usage, which is picked up in its adverb form in v.37, is sure evidence that it does not have moral connotations for Paul."

–Gordon Fee. *New International Commentary on the NT*. p.328

“Paul may seem to agree completely with those who argued for the celibate life, and this in contrast to Genesis 2.18, “It is not good that the man should be alone” and the usual Jewish view in favor of the married state. But Paul’s statement of 7.1 is not to be taken absolutely; it is his suggestion specifically for Corinth because of some present crisis there that he refers to in 7.26 (cf. 7.29, 35). Part of this crisis may have been connected with possible times of persecution they might have to suffer for the Lord.”

–D.A. Carson, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, p.227

Representative voices from church history

“It pleased God ... to inspire [in some a] strong desire to live a single life; because the dissemination of the gospel required poverty and martyrdom, the single life was advantageous. But after that storm was over, the state of marriage and family returned to its first blessing, as that “hallowed” and “to increase and multiply”.

–Jeremy Taylor (1613), Selected Works, p.261-267

[Of Gen 1.28] “From this passage we may be assured that man and woman *should* and *must* come together in order to multiply ... ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ ... is more than a command, namely a divine ordinance which is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore.... It is a nature and disposition just as innate as the organs involved in it. Therefore, just as God does not command anyone to be a man or woman but creates them the way they have to be, so he does not command them to multiply but creates them so that they have to multiply. And wherever men try to resist this, it remains irresistible nonetheless and goes its way through fornication, adultery, and secret sins, for *this is a matter of nature and not of choice.*”

–Martin Luther, sermon “The Estate of Marriage”, 1523

“The choice to marry is not put in our own hands, as if we were to deliberate on the matter.”

–John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion

“Q 138: What are the duties required in the 7th commandment? A) the duties required in the 7th commandment are [among other things pertaining to holiness of mind and body] ... marriage by those that have not the gift of continency.... Q. 139: What are the sins forbidden in the 7th commandment: a) ... the undue delay of marriage either in ourselves or others.”

–Larger Catechism of Westminster Confession, 1647

Got The Gift? : 3 questions to help discern

- Biblically speaking, unless otherwise divinely informed, you *don't* have the single-for-life gift. You're supposed to get married.
- Calling comes from God. Calling comes with authority. We do not have the prerogative to delay **pursuing marriage-readiness on the way to marriage**.

1. Ready to give all for the gospel mission? (concentrated kingdom work)

- The call to lifelong singleness does **not glorify God less** than the call to marriage. Neither is the calling to singleness less enjoyable or enriching.

▶ **Illustration: Grace to serve in God's calling - Dean Adamek**

2. Can you go the distance? (the sex-free life)

- Paul was equipped by God for joyful, life-long abstinence.
- Both Jesus and Paul said, 'not everyone can receive this' – can you?

The first way man is told to how to imitate God is by _____ .

3. Is it good for you to be alone? (satisfied w/o intimate companionship)

- Some of you *feel* the reality of what Adam felt before Eve came along. There's nothing wrong with that. (Trust God. Pray. Prepare for marriage.)
- Others need to believe God's assessment by faith, knowing that He knows what is best for us – He knows us better than we know ourselves.
- The moment we either *feel* or *believe by faith* that it is not good for **me** to be alone, we will move from valuing marriage to pursuing it.