

## Contemplations for the Single Christian

**Propositional Statement:** The church will learn 5 contemplations for the Single Christian so that he may properly live out his singleness or progression towards marriage.

### Concerns about Singleness and Marriage (7:1a)

Paul has finished addressing concerns for the church in Corinthian from Chloe's people (1:11) and possibly from another individual (5:1). But in chapter seven he begins to respond to the letter he received from the Corinthian church. This is the first set of concerns of the Corinthian Church that Paul addresses giving showing that it is of urgent concern. 1 Corinthians 5:1 speaks of an immorality that is not even acceptable among the Gentiles and yet it is occurring amongst the church of Corinthian that a man is having sexual relations with his step-mother. Also note in 1 Corinthians 6:9 that Paul condemns a list of sexual immoral acts saying that those who habitually accept and practice them will not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul takes time to respond to the churches concerns about singleness and marriage so that these issues involving immoral sexual acts occurring will be dealt with.

There are two principles that can be taken from this small verse 1a:

### *A Believer must address the topic of sex and marriage from the Word of God*

The Corinthian believers did not go to a secular source concerning their marital status. They purposely sought out Paul through a letter to seek the truth concerning the issues of singleness and marriage. We know Paul as one who was moved by the Holy Spirit to write down His Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21). Seeking truth was also a struggle for them. They could have sought the secular philosophies of the Greeks which surrounded them. Notice in Chapter 2 and 3 that they were struggling to discern the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. Paul has to make a clear distinction of worldly wisdom and of godly wisdom. When one succumbs to worldly wisdom concerning singleness and marriage sexual boundaries begin to break. Believers must not follow what the world says about sex and single or marriage life but must seek the Word of God.

### *Addressing the topic of sex and marriage should be a communal concern*

In the greek the word "wrote" is in a form that points out there were multiple people were involved in writing. It is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural. This means that there was more than one person who had a concern for sex and marriage and these people wrote in unity. They were concerned as a church and they gathered their concerns and wrote one letter to Paul. The Puritans expressed this kind of communal concern. In Ryken's book *Worldly Saints* he explains the Puritan's framework of marriage and sex: procreation, remedy of sin, and lastly mutual society, help and comfort<sup>1</sup>. The Puritan framework shows that sex and marriage was a social concern in which they can help and comfort one another.

Today, the church must be united in addressing this issue because the church consists of believers single and married. There will be broken families because they struggled through the hardships of sexual immorality. There will be divorces. There will be non-believers married to believers. There will be men and women, single or married, struggling in the purity. So as a church this topic needs to be address so that believers can minister to such situations.

### Commendation of Abstinence (7:1b)

Paul first statement concerning the issue of singleness and marriage is one of abstinence. He says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." The word "to touch" implies sexual intercourse. This is completely opposite of what the world thinks. In an ethic report<sup>2</sup> by *U.S. News and World Report*, this question is asked, "Is

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<sup>1</sup> Ryken, *Worldly Saints*.

<sup>2</sup> Feinberg, *Ethics in a Brave New World*

it wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations before marriage?” Here are the responses: “thirty-six percent said it was wrong, but 61 percent thought it was morally acceptable. In the youngest age group questioned, the favorable response was even higher, with 78 percent approving.” More than 50 percent of the people questioned believe that it is ok to have sex outside of marriage. That is what people think about sex outside of marriage but how about what people actually practice? In a survey by *Paradise*, “Eleven million teenage boys in 1988 found that two-thirds of them claimed to have had sex with a girl, most of them by the time they were fifteen.”

Here lies our problem: many believe that it is ok to have sex outside of marriage and practice it. There are two views<sup>3</sup> that express this belief which is counter the view of abstinence the first one is called the Natural Impulse View.

### *Natural Impulse View*

This says that sex is simply just an impulse. If you have the physical urge to have sex with someone and the other party is willing, do it. This view matches that of Playboy. Those who hold this view sees sex as natural and that it should be expressed without boundaries. “Greater human happiness is attained if people can take whatever pleasure they can get from sex without the burden of moral guilt, as long as they do not satisfy their sexual urges by using a partner involuntarily, hurtfully, or deceitfully.”<sup>4</sup> The second view that permits sex is good for the single is called the Affection View.

### *Affection View*

While the natural impulse view has basically no boundaries, this view claims to have some boundaries which are limited by emotion. Those who practice this view can use sex to see if they should get married. Relationship is built off “compatibility not covenant.” “Compatibility just happens” Something clicks between each other. Though there seems to be some kind of boundary from one's emotion, it is not strong enough to deal with the moral problems that might occur. “It is like walking a lion on a leash. Sometimes he goes where you want him to. Sometimes he will not. Sometimes he turns around and devours you.”

There are three main problems if people practice their singleness through these views. Here are the problems when one tries to practice one or a mixture of these views:

- 1.) *Highly relativistic.* Morals are defined by individuals and not by an absolute standard. When this occurs sex becomes unlimited. Some can rationalize that it is ok to have sex with a child. Some can say it is ok to have with two or more people at the same time. Some can say that there is nothing wrong with having sex with the same gender. Saying that sex is ok outside of marriage is one of the first steps towards other immoral sexual acts.
- 2.) *Unwanted pregnancies increase.* The marriage covenant keeps accountability high for all of its purposes: pleasure, procreation and remedy for sexual immorality. But when sex occurs outside of marriage, the possibility of having an unwanted child increase. There is less to no accountability for the upbringing of that unplanned child birth which results into either increase in adoption or increase in abortion.
- 3.) *Problem of STD's.* Sexually transmitted diseases can easily occur because of sex outside of marriage. If the practice of sexual abstinence is universal, STD would probably not exist at all. But when sexual abstinence is not practiced STD probability increase dramatically.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. These two views are defined and described.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- 4.) *True Intimacy cannot be found.* Experiment with sex will not lead to intimacy with another individual. Practicing such views will lead to false intimacy. Relationships will be built on carnality and fleshly ideas rather than on spiritual truth.

Big problems occur when societies cannot submit to the simplicity of God's Word. Sexual Abstinence may seem boring to practice but 1 Corinthians 7:1a shows us that it is not. The verse shows that sexual abstinence is good, advantageous and complementary to the one who is single.

### ***Sexual Abstinence is Good***

Paul's first word about sexual abstinence is "good". Paul makes it clear that there is nothing wrong being sexually inactive. There was a Jewish tradition that claims marriage is the ideal status that a man should be in. This idea believes that all men should find their way into a marital status. It portrays singleness to be a sin. An article<sup>5</sup> about Jewish celibacy shows how the some Jews deplored the idea:

Marriage is a commandment in Jewish tradition and celibacy is deplored. The first positive precept in the Bible is "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28) and this sets the pattern for Jewish attitudes. Procreation is a holy obligation, so that deliberate abstention from marriage has never been condoned; indeed many authorities regard it as a sin. ...The normative teaching is contained in the saying, "He who is without a wife is without joy, without blessing, without happiness, without learning, without protection, without peace; indeed he is no man" (Yev. 62b).<sup>6</sup>

The Jewish believers may have been trying to convince the immature believers at Corinth that singles need to get married. But Paul is telling them not fall into the traditions of men but rather see the freedom of singleness in Christ.

### ***Sexual Abstinence is Advantageous***

The second truth is that sexual Abstinence is advantageous. In the Greek construction this verse shows that it is advantageous to not touch a woman. A possible translation of this verse is "it is a good advantage to a man..." The comparison being made is between marriage and abstinence and therefore Paul is saying it is advantageous to be single over marriage.

But one must not take this to an extreme view as how the Roman Catholics practice celibacy for their clergy. They believe that to be celibate is holier than those who are married for the Lord. During the Middle Ages Roman Catholics believe that, "sexual love itself was evil and did not cease to be so if its object were one's spouse." This quote is saying that even in marriage sex is bad. Many of the early church Fathers believe that the act of and passion of sex was sinful. "Origen took Matthew 19:12, the passage we read earlier, so literally that he had himself castrated before being ordained." Such negative view of sex elevated virginity and celibacy in a heretical way.

A negative result of Roman Catholic Celibacy is the accounts of sexual abuse of boys. Turning celibacy into a pointless tradition has distorted the way clergy should deal with young men. From so called ministry into molestation of male children. A journal article about the issue writes, "It is only common sense to see a connection between the scandals and the requirements of priestly celibacy... one needn't be Catholic to have some inkling of the spiritual impulse behind celibacy..."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> (Journal Internet Source)

<sup>6</sup> (Journal Internet Source)

<sup>7</sup> (Journal Internet Source)

So then how is Sexual abstinence an advantage? This will be seen later when we look at the fourth point: Challenges towards and in Marriage. But before we get to the next point let us look at the last truth about sexual abstinence: it is complimentary for the single man.

### ***Sexual Abstinence Compliments Singleness***

It is clear that sex compliments marriage. But many don't see the inverse for singles. Singleness is designed to practice sexual abstinence. C.S Lewis says, "Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence." Sexual abstinence is designed for the individual who is single. It is abnormal for a single to be sexual active. It is a sexual perversion for a single to participate in sexual activity. Therefore to properly take the advantage of one's singleness and experience its goodness one must submit to sexual abstinence.

### **Caution of Sexual Immorality (7:2a)**

Though sexual abstinence is proper for the single, it is still a thin line to walk. Notice the word "because". In the greek there are two ways of pointing out a cause and in this instance the "because is modifying "not to touch". Paul is saying that though with all the goodness and advantages of singleness, there is a challenge in trying to maintain the act that compliments sexual abstinence. That challenge is sexual immorality.

This part of the verse can be translated as "but because of the sexual immoralities". This can imply that Paul is referring to a previous thought possibly back to 1 Corinthians 6:18. Therefore it can be concluded that marriage is a means of fleeing from sexual immorality.

### **Challenges towards and in Marriage (7:2b-5)**

One might think that marriage is the easy way to flee sexual immorality but it is not true. It may be the most effective way but definitely not the easiest. Paul makes no positives statements about marriage. Rather he is showing the challenges of marriage. He is not degrading marriage because he has a lofty theology of Christ and the church involving marriage (Eph. 5:22-33). To distinguish between the challenges of singleness and marriage follow the illustration. The path of singleness is straight and clear but you are walking on a tight rope. The path of marriage is broader where you don't have to do a death defying balancing act but it does have a lot of bushels to cut and weave through.

### **Discovery of Spouse (7:2b)**

The initial challenge of marriage is discovering a worthy spouse. This discovery is a mystery enduring the jungles of courtship or dating. There is the difficulty of getting to know them as a person and not as an object for sexual pleasure or for social status. Once you get to the stage of getting to know the person, you still must have a good report with the possible in-laws. Then comes the actual marriage.

In the greek it shows a clear manner of how the process of marriage should take place. A possible translation is "each man must have a wife *of himself* and each woman must have that only man." The greek the construction points that the woman will come into the care of the man. The man will have possession of a woman. The idea of possession is not found for the woman but rather the idea of "being the exclusive property of someone." Now in light of marriage, instead of property it is the idea of being the exclusive *wife* of someone.

A man must be ready to absorb a woman of excellence and a woman must be ready to be the exclusive wife of a worthy man. The book of Proverbs speaks of pursuing lady wisdom rather than lady folly. Then at the end of the book there is a picture of the ideal wife: the Proverbs 31 woman.

The discovery of a spouse is the challenge of who to pursue, when to pursue, how to pursue. Once this challenge is overcome, next comes the Duty of Marriage.

### **Duty of Marriage (7:3)**

Though sex in marriage is a blessing there is still a sense of duty. It is the obligation of the husband to fulfill the sexual needs of the spouse and vice-versa. Remember Paul is not emphasizing the joy of marital sex but rather as a simple fact of marriage. He uses words of market exchange. He is not using words such as in Song of Solomon. Song of Solomon uses vivid poetry to capture the beauty of marital sex but here Paul uses facts, accounting terminology. Paul is retaining the seriousness of sexual morality because the Corinthian church is already struggling in this issue. He must emphasize the duty of marriage because they are not treating their marriage with such respect.

### **Dispensing of Personal Bodily Authority (7:4)**

Ownership of the body no longer belongs to the individual but it belongs to the spouse. In marriage, the husband and the wife must submit the authority of their bodies to one another. Paul's switches from using market terminology to military terminology. The Greek word can be used for rule or reign yet Paul is using in the opposite manner to give the idea of surrendering. Once again it is a straight forward approach concerning sexual activity. There is nothing colorful. It is simply another challenge in marriage.

### **Disagreement of Intimate Time (7:5a)**

In verse 1-4, Paul was addressing single people who are either finding contentment in their singleness or contending for marriage. But in verse 5 he addresses the married believers who show action of trying to convert back to singleness/celebacy. He says in verse 5, "Do not deprive one another". Paul is addressing a real issue of marriage where spouses are depriving sex to possibly gain leverage for their own selfish reasons. This is a possible reason because Paul previously emphasized the need to surrender one's own body.

Another reason as to why they were depriving one another of sex could be because they didn't know if it was pleasing to God. Some were in marriage where the one of the spouses was not a believer (1 Cor. 7:10-16). Whichever possible reason Paul commanded them to stop depriving. Note that there are three verbs that are commands; have (v.2b), fulfill (v.3), and deprive (v. 5). The situation needed for imperatives to deal with the concerns of the Corinthian church.

### **Dichotomy between Spiritual Disciplines and Intimacy (7:5b)**

Considering the two reasons as to why Paul commands them to stop depriving one another, he gives them a time to stop all sexual intimacy and approach God through prayer concerning whichever reasons. Married couples should pray together yet there are times when they need to pray on their own because the sin issue may inflict damage to the relationship. Withdrawing from the relationship to look to prayer for answers is a way for spouse to come back ready to tackle whatever issue they need to face.

### **Danger of Satan (7:5c)**

During the time of separation, Satan may look to that to tempt the married couples. The longer the separation the higher the possibility temptation can grow. Peter says Satan is like a roaring lion waiting to devour. Therefore the time of separation or the time of sexual deprivation should be thought out and planned to come back together again. Not to see how long one can wait it out. The issue at hand is self-control. Paul says "because of your lack of self-control." Self-control needs to be understood in light of temptation. Temptation from Satan increases when there is no self-control and separation between the married couples. The responsibility of marital sex is a spiritual battle and Satan will try many things to destroy it. Marriage reflects the very gospel of Jesus Christ and Satan will do

anything to twist it. Therefore people who are married must be aware that their marriage including martial sex is a target for Satan to attack God and to destroy you and your marriage.

### **Concession of Paul (7:6-7)**

He switches back to address the people who are single and gives his concession. This word gives the idea of permission. Paul is saying, "If you would permit my advice single people." Now notice that his advice or opinion has 20 years of experience. He may have been single for a long time and is giving his wisdom. If married couples who have been together for 20 years we would see their wisdom for marriage as worthy so to with Paul in light of singleness.

### **Wish of Paul**

Simply his wish is for all to be like him; single and there submitting to sexual abstinence. All the things listed concerning marriage is not to advertise marriage but to advertise singleness. Faithful singles do not have to worry about finding a spouse. They do not have to fulfill the duty of marriage. They don't have to surrender their body. They don't have to deal with a sinner of the opposite sex for a lifetime. That is why Paul makes this wish for all. He even makes another case for singleness in 1 Corinthians 7:32-40. But Paul understands that his wish is not the will of God's.

### **Will of God**

Paul is aware that God has given to each a gift one of singleness and one of marriage. People must remember that everyone was given the gift of singleness when they were born. When the time of marriage comes for an individual he must be ready for the gift exchange. Therefore Paul ends this issue for the single in the sovereignty of God. If the believer decides what gift to cling to he will trust in the Gift-giving God.

### **Conclusion**

Singleness is complementary to sexual abstinence and when the individual who is single is faithful to it he will experience its goodness and advantage. But since sexual abstinence is a very difficult challenge for the single to uphold he must flee from it through marriage. Marriage is not less difficult then from singleness and sexual abstinence. Marriage has its unique challenges of searching of spouse, sexual duty, surrendering of the body and spiritual situation that Satan wants to spear at. Therefore Paul gives his advice to the single to consider and weigh the challenges of singleness to the challenges of marriage. However Paul understands that singleness and marriage is a gift and God is the one who freely choses to dispense it to who He desires. Therefore let us make wise decisions through the teachings and opinion of Paul about relationship status and seek to please God in it whether we are single or married.