



What is Singleness?

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

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. 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.

Sunday evening's talk was structured around three things that should define godly singleness: FRUITFULNESS, FAITHFULNESS, FAMILY.

Fruitfulness: "*anxious about the things of the Lord*" v32

Paul is writing to a church in Corinth, advising believers there on some of the most personal issues of the heart. He is clear that both he and God want the ultimate good for the Christians in Corinth, and for us today. He is quite clear here: marriage brings anxiety that singleness does not. Single people can spend their time thinking about the kingdom of heaven, where married people are naturally and rightfully concerned with their spouses and families.

- In the old covenant, the key way of growing the people of God was through family, through offspring and bloodlines. But we don't live under the old covenant any more. In the new covenant, the family of God grows through adoption, through people being added in through faith in Jesus's saving sacrifice on the cross.
- Therefore single people can be fruitful for God by living lives that shout this truth that earthly family is not the most important thing, heavenly family is.

Faithfulness: “undivided devotion” v35

- This is an opportunity to discuss this saying of Jesus further: Matthew 19: 10-12
The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” 11 But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”
- We need to remember that our primary calling is to abide in Jesus- our faithfulness to Jesus is the source of our fruitfulness, whether we are married or single
- Are we trusting in God’s faithfulness? Are we trusting that his word is true, and therefore that singleness can be a good thing?

Family: Paul recommends singleness “to promote good order” v35

- We have to work this out in the context of family- our church family. Church should be a place where singleness is both totally normal and genuinely celebrated, not a place where it is awkward or looked down upon There are several approaches to this challenge:
- The first is that we need to be careful with our language. We need to watch ourselves for idle gossip or thoughtless jokes to single people about the state of their love lives.
- We have to first cultivate a good understanding of singleness, and this happens alongside our efforts to take down the idols of marriage and romance.
- We therefore have to cultivate real care for single people within the church. As well as this high theological regard for singleness, we need to live out this regard in real life. Acts 2:44 “*And all who believed were together and had all things in common.*” Sincerely valuing single people in community is vital.

Questions:

- John Piper says: “*God promises those of you who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children, and he calls you to display, by the Christ-exalting devotion of your singleness, the truths about Christ and his kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than through marriage*

and childrearing." This can feel like a controversial quote, but Paul said that he wished people could remain single like him.

- What is our immediate reaction to statements like this?
- Why can some of the blessings of singleness be counted as better than the blessings of marriage?
- As the church, do we live like we value singleness like this?
- What are some of the barriers (both personal and corporate as the church) that might make valuing singleness in this way tricky?
- Is singleness a calling or a choice? (I personally think it is both. God will only call to singleness those who can at the end of the day choose singleness.)
- How do we balance the often raw emotional reality of singleness with the eternal reality of God's word? (My suggestions are: cultivating emotional honesty with God, submitting ourselves to His will, the prayerful support of close Christian brothers and sisters.)

We have all been single at one point or another, or are maybe single now. If appropriate, I think it might be positive to break your small group down into small discussions, talking more personally about the experience of being single, and specifically whether the church has been helpful or hurtful during this time. I think this would also be a good time to pray, praying for the single people in your small group to experience this fruitfulness, faithfulness and family, but also praying that married people would be gifted with spiritual empathy and deep care for the single people around them.



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