

## Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 7:6-9 - What About Singles?

So we are continuing through this section on Christian sexual ethics and I just want to again that God has a comprehensive plan for every aspect of our lives. You've heard me say that several times now, but you really, really need to understand this. The stuff we're covering isn't in the appendix of the Bible, it's not unimportant to God. It's how he's ordered the universe to bring glory to himself.

And the most intimate act between a man and woman is part of his ordered universe. We either give God glory through our understanding and actions with sexual ethics or we don't. So he either receives worship or he is deprived of worship.

This morning we get to talk about singleness and widowhood to the glory of God. When I was in Bible college there was sort of constant state nervousness for most kids because, let's be honest, a lot of these kids went to Bible college to find their spouse. The old joke was that the ladies went to get their "MRS" degree. They want to find a man. And that's not wrong. For most people there is a drive to be married. There is an intrinsic desire for companionship that expresses itself in the one flesh union.

But that desire doesn't exist for everyone. And - more to Paul's point here - it's not a requirement that a Christian has to be married. Now, this is really important for us to understand especially as a small, conservative church with large families and lots of homeschooling happening. There are some who wrongly believe that the only way to honor God is by getting married at an early age and having a million kids. I don't think anyone here actually believes that. But just understand, that can be the perception.

It's the Jim Gaffigan comedy thing: "Well, I guess that's one way to live your life. You know what it's like having 4 kids? Imagine you're drowning and someone hands you a baby." So on the one hand, we are pro-marriage and pro-life in the sense that children are blessings.

But that's not the whole story. In fact, what we're going to see here is that in Paul's mind, the single life is actually the highest good. Because when you're single you can do ministry that is simply not possible when you're married.

There are avenues of service to the Lord that single folks have that married folks don't. And that's good.

So this morning we're unpacking a sexual ethic of singleness. Singleness to the glory of God.

### 1) Singleness is option that brings God glory. Read 6-7

So let me just say right out of the gate that it's a tragedy that most Christians look at adult singles as though there's something wrong with them. They're odd, they're broken, what's wrong? They're often treated as second class citizens in the Kingdom.

At the same time, most adult singles are dying inside because they want to be married with all their heart. They want a godly woman, godly man, they want to get married, settle down and have kids. And so the really awkward part is that you have people who want this who aren't married. And people who are married who are judging them.

That attitude is pervasive in the church. I remember being 20 and not even dating Jodee yet. I had graduated Bible college and didn't have a girlfriend and thinking "I'm going to be single forever!!" So you married people just remember what it was like to be single and wanting a spouse - and be helpful with how you talk about marriage.

Here, Paul actually says the highest good is if someone has the ability to live life without the desire to be married. He's not talking about someone who is single and wants to be married. He's talking about someone who, for whatever reason, has no desire to be married. Or maybe just a very faint desire to be married.

He's saying if that's you: that's okay. That's his life. **Read 6a**

Most scholars believe that Paul had to have been married at some time. In Judaism, singleness was looked down on. You were broken if you were single at 20. Paul was a rabbi, a Pharisee and served on the Sanhedrin which required its members to be married.

But he's single now. What happened? Well, we don't know. We can only speculate. Either he was a widower - his wife died at some point. Or maybe his wife divorced him when he became a Christian. I tend to think he was a widower because he says he wishes all people were like him and I can't imagine that means he wishes all people had their unbelieving spouse divorce them.

I think at some point he was married, she died. He never mentions children so she may have died early on or been barren - we really don't know. But he seems content with his station in life as a single Christian.

And here's the beautiful thing: he's not commanding singleness and he's not commanding marriage. He's recommending singleness to those who aren't married or are widowed as a very good thing that brings God glory.

This was radically different than Judaism at the time. This was completely countercultural. "How can you please God by being single?" Glad you asked.

### **Look down at Vss. 25-38. Read**

The Corinthians lived in a situation where marriage could be very difficult. Lots of persecution, lots of distress. If you live in a society where you're worried about the safety of your family when you go out to work - it's hard to be effective for the Lord. Because your mind is on your family.

But, he's clear that getting married is not a sin either. But singleness is also a legitimate option in the Kingdom of Jesus. Four years ago when we were in the infancy stages of planning RBC I was at Silverwood in line for a roller coaster. And I was talking to a guy who happened to be on the pastoral search committee for a small Bible church over in Idaho. And I was talking with him about the search. He wanted a verse by verse preacher, conservative, loved people. But they had a requirement that the candidate had to be married and ideally have young kids. That's a problem; a huge red flag.

Why is that a red flag? Because that's going beyond what is written. And I told this guy, "Brother I am your perfect candidate. I'm literally everything you want in a pastor. And I wouldn't interview at your church because you have set an unbiblical standard for pastors. You would exclude the apostle Paul from being your pastor. You would exclude the apostle Barnabas from being your pastor. You exclude Jesus from being your pastor. And you would turn this very section on its head." They had an unbiblical view of what the office of pastor is.

"But doesn't an elder need to be a one woman man according to 1 Tim. 3?" Yes he does, but what that phrase means is that he's not promiscuous. He's not a womanizer. If he's married he needs to be faithful. If he has kids they need to be managed well. But there's no biblical obligation for a pastor to be married. The moral requirements are set in stone, but the situational ones are not.

**Look at 9:1-14.** This is a little bit of a longer section but I think it's helpful. Here is more evidence - I think - that Paul was a widower because he says he has the right to have a believing wife, which he wouldn't if he were divorced. This whole section is about paying your preacher. But his argument is that all preachers of the word - married and single - should be financially supported. **Read 1-12**

He and Barnabas were apparently single. But they weren't second class citizens in the Kingdom. It wasn't like Peter and his wife could sit back and let the checks roll in while Paul and Barnabas had to hustle on the side. They all hustled, but the point is they had a right as ministers to be supported even if they were single.

**Look back at Matt. 19:1-12.** This is Jesus's teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage and he speaks to the issue of singleness. Jesus was single. And sinless. Here Jesus says some hard things about divorce. But notice what he says at the very end. **Read 1-9**

So is it lawful to get a divorce? No. But what about Moses? Moses allowed it, but God did not. The only exception is pornea - sexual immorality before marriage - that would break of the betrothal period where two people weren't totally married, but they were considered husband and wife - like Mary and Joseph at the beginning of Matthew.

And the disciples are astonished at this. You can't get divorced? Are you kidding me Jesus? Did we misunderstand this? No, he doubles down. **Read 10-12**

What's all this talk about eunuchs all of a sudden? Parents I'll let you define eunuchs for your kids, but the bottom line is that they were unable to have sex and therefore were not married. They lived the single life. And interestingly, it was usually a life of honor and privilege.

There are eunuchs who have been so from birth. So if a family was close to the king, and the king wanted a man to serve in the royal household anywhere near the queen or maids, they had to be eunuchs to ensure they wouldn't commit adultery. So parents would often have their son be made a eunuch so he could serve in the royal household. They were single, not by choice. But they served the king in a very special and intimate way.

Then there were adults who would do that same thing too. Maybe they had an opportunity to serve the king in a situation where they guarded the queen or the children. But they needed to be a eunuch to do so and they would get the surgery so they could serve the king in a special way.

The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8? He had that role because he likely had access to the queen. When you look at eunuchs in the OT, they almost always have some connection with the king or royal service. Those are physical eunuchs.

And then Jesus says there another situation where people become eunuchs. And I don't think he means physically, I think he means spiritually. There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. What he means is that there are those that when they realize the high commitment of marriage, permanent covenant bond of marriage, and they realize there's no way out - they decide not to get married. And because they decide not to get married, they are able to serve King Jesus in a very special way.

That's what Paul is getting to back in **1 Cor. 7**. Singleness as a way of life is a legitimate and pleasing thing to the Lord. So singleness brings glory to God.

## 2) Singleness is a gift from God. Read 6-9

So singleness is actually a gift from God.

Now, before I unpack this let me say that I don't think Paul is talking about people who happen to be single but really, really want to be married. If you're in that category, you're part of the people he says burn with passion and should go get married. Having a desire to be married and intimate with a husband or wife is not wrong. That, too, is actually a gift.

And I just want to say my heart goes out to you single folks who want a wife, want a husband. I seriously pray for you that the Lord would provide a godly spouse.

But what Paul is talking about are those who, in Jesus's words, have made themselves eunuchs for God's Kingdom. They don't have a deep desire to be married and because of that they can serve King Jesus in a capacity most others can't. That's not a weird thing. That's not strange.

That's literally a gift from God. In the Greek it's charisma - which is the exact same word Paul will use later to describe spiritual gifts from God. Singleness is a graciously bestowed gift from God. It's actually God spiritually superseding the natural order of desire so that a person can serve him in a very unique way. Some people have that gift. Some people have the gift of desiring a spouse.

But it is a gracious gift from God. And let me tell you, if you have that gift or know someone who has that gift, that's a good thing! If you just don't have a strong desire to be married and don't have a strong desire to be

intimate with a spouse, then go serve the Lord in the fullest capacity you can. You have an amazing capability that other people do not.

You remember when that whole CHAZ/CHOP thing was going down in Seattle last year? I know of a group of people who were like, "Hey, you know what those guys really need? They need Jesus. Let's go over there and preach the gospel to the CHOP people." They got off work, and drove to Seattle that night and preached Jesus to violent thugs. I couldn't do that. I've got to put my kids to bed and make waffles in the morning. I'm tied up.

They're not. They can preach and disciple and minister in ways most of us never can. It's a gift of God that he will reward because it is a special type of service.

### **3) For most people, singleness is temporary. Read 8-9**

So, this is where we know that just because you're single right now doesn't mean you have the gift of singleness in the sense of the long term gifting.

I think this is everyone's fear when they're 20: what if I have the gift?? I don't want the gift of singleness! I want a wife and babies!

If that's you, then you probably don't have the gift. God in his sovereignty has you single for now, but that is likely not your station.

There's several groups he's talking to here: Married people. Betrothed people on their way to getting married. Single people who have no current interest - that's these verses. Widows. And those who are either divorced or married to unbelievers. He's hitting about every station in life.

But if you're single, Paul says maybe consider staying single. If your place in life is that way and you don't have a strong desire for sexual intimacy, maybe this is a good path for you. It's Paul's path. He did what no other apostle could do because he wasn't married.

But if you're burning with passion - if you desire a husband or wife - that's okay too. Go get married. I remember sitting in a youth ministry class at Bible college and our professor just straight called out the guys in our class. He said, "Brothers, there are some very godly women in this classroom right here who would make wonderful wives and want you to ask them out. Stop praying for God to show you a woman, they're right here. You don't need a sign from heaven. Get off your knees and get on the phone."

Look, there's risk in putting yourself out there. It'll be awkward and you could get shot down. Yeah, but as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach says: No risk it, no biscuit. And maybe this is going to sound uncouth, but ladies you can approach guys too you know. I know, for some of you your courting paradigm just exploded. But I'll remind you that one of the most godly women in the Bible - Ruth - approached Boaz for marriage. From whom came David, from whom came Jesus. And I wouldn't be married for almost 18 years and have 6 kids if Jodee wasn't just a little bit persistent. You don't ask, you don't get.

That was all for free. You're welcome. I'll be out of town all this week. The point here is that for most singleness is temporary.

He also address widows here as well. **Read 8-9**

So becoming a widow or widower also has affects in terms of sexual intimacy. Widows and singles are in the same basic boat because they both didn't decide on their station in life, but many still desire to be married. They desire intimacy. What then?

Same thing: maybe consider staying single to serve the Lord. But if you want to get married, that's fine to.

**Look down at 7:39-40. Read**

So if you're married and your spouse dies, it is okay to get remarried. That's not a sin, that's not disrespecting your former husband or wife. My kids know that if I die, mama might get remarried. I want my kids to have a

godly father in their life. He's not replacing me. He's loving them and loving mama and helping to raise them in the fear and admonition of the Lord.

"Yeah, but so and so use got remarried because they want to have sex." Yeah - and there's nothing at all wrong with that. Literally, Paul says that's the only reason you should get remarried. If you don't need intimacy, don't get remarried. If you're going to burn with passion, then get remarried.

We don't believe in eternal marriage. The Bible says marriage terminates at death. Because when we die, the true marriage begins - between us and Jesus.

Also, we see here that the widow is free to remarry whoever. There's no limits. There's this weird thing that happens when a spouse dies that it's almost like "Well, I can't marry that guy because that'd be weird." Says who? Are they a believer? Are they godly? If there wasn't anything sinful happening before, I generally don't see any reason to avoid someone. Married to whom she **wishes**.

There's one exception: only in the Lord. Christians only marry Christians. Not someone who just says they're a Christian or someone who plays the game to try to convince you. But someone who has had a deep and abiding love for Jesus and encourages you in the faith. If that's the case, there's nothing wrong.

### **Look at 1 Tim. 5.**

This is Paul talking about how to care for widows in the church. In ancient times there was no social security or IRAs or life insurance for the wife if her husband died. She was destitute unless she had children. So this section is about how to care for widows in the church. And the bottom line is that if there is absolutely no one else, no other family, who can care for her, then the church gladly takes care of the widows. But there's some requirements. **Read 9-16**

So if the widow is over 60 and has basically been a model of godliness, the church takes care of her if no one else will. But what about younger widows? What if a young lady's husband died tragically? The church doesn't support them. Who does? Her new husband. Paul says they need to go get married. They don't have the gift - the gift of singleness - because they've already been married.

And since they're young, they end up going around doing and saying things that aren't helpful. **Read 13**

If you know a young widow or widower, they need to know that it's okay and good to go get remarried and have children. It's not wrong. It's not disrespecting their spouse. It's God's design. In fact, if they don't get remarried and they do get caught up in gossip and being a busybody - which is someone who does a lot of things, but nothing worthwhile - then that's actually a way Satan slanders the gospel.

No, go get married, have babies and manage their household well. That's a good thing.

The plan of God in Christ for his church includes marriage and remarriage and singleness. These are not afterthoughts in Christ's Church - they are ways he gets glory.

### **Pray**