

# **1 Corinthians 7 – Singleness and Marriage**

**Carmel Baptist Church**

*July 1, 2012*

## **Intro:**

- Good morning... Today is our fourth week preaching through the book of 1 Corinthians, as we look at how the Apostle Paul addressed the many issues facing the Corinthian church in the first century...
- Over the next two weeks, we will be looking at 1 Corinthians 7, examining what Paul said about singleness and marriage to the Corinthian church, and how it applies to us today...
- This week, my primary focus will be on the topic of singleness, while next week, Dr. Clay Barnes will preach on marriage from the same chapter.
  - These two sermons, will be in essence two sides of the same coin...

## **Don't Tune Me Out...**

- Now, my guess is that immediately, there is a temptation to want to tune me out.
  - First, for those that are single...  
You may be thinking... Here we go again... just what I need... another relationship talk.  
Or some may be thinking... Rob... You don't know my hurt. Or, you don't know my situations.
    - And the fact is, you are right.
- **But what I do know is that there are many types of singleness in this room...**
  - There are young singles.
  - There are single parents.
  - There are older singles, never married.
  - There are some many in this room that have gone through divorce.
  - And there are many that have experienced the loss of the spouse and now live single as a widow or widower.
- Again, I don't pretend to know or understand each situation is in this room.
  - But I do understand that many in this room live in a place of deep woundedness, grief and disappointment because of their singleness.
  - And I realize that this can be a very sensitive issue for many...  
So my hope today, is that what you hear, is heard in the love and grace that it is intended.
- Also, I think it is only fair for me to say that although I may NOT know YOUR hurt or disappointment in this area...
  - As a man that was single until the age of 32, I have my own.  
So I can relate on some levels.
- **Now, for married couples, there is also a temptation to tune me out as well.**
  - You are thinking, "How nice for Rob to address this subject and give me a week off from having to pay attention."  
That is NOT the case!

- Today we are going to talk a lot about marriage as well.

As we dig into this text, you will quickly see that the two cannot be talked about in isolation...

- **Then now does this apply to me??? You may still be asking...**

- Lets just look at a few of the reasons why...
  1. Because your children are single.
    - The fact that they may only be 10 year old does not make them any less single... And if you care about their future, it is important to be aware of what awaits them...
  2. Charlotte has 2300 young single adults moving to our city every month.
    - So this is something that both OUR church and THE church in our city must take note of... As it is a huge mission field...
  3. You are part of a church family with many single adults.
    - And as family, we are called to love each other. This requires listening and understanding where they are.
  4. And finally, this issue matters because we must make sure our view of singleness and marriage is in line with God's view of singleness and marriage...

### **Singleness is Not Easy:**

- That being said, being single in our world today **is not easy**.
- The fact is marriage is the norm in our society –
  - According to research I found, anywhere from 80% to 90% of adults in America get married at some point in their life.
 

Thus, the vast majority of this room will be married at some point.
  - And because it's the norm, singleness can still carry a stigma in our society.
 

One that as we will find out, is biblically unwarranted.
- Also, Singles in our culture are sent **VERY mixed messages:**
- **On one hand, they are told that without marriage, they will never be truly fulfilled in life...**
  - That they are “less than” their married friends.
 

That true happiness is only found in the arms of another...
  - In fact, marriage is such an engrained part of our culture, many believe to not marry is to miss out on the American Dream...
 

This dream that tells us that everyone has an opportunity to work hard, make something of their life, get married, buy a nice house with white picket fence, have 2.3 children and live happily ever after...
- **On the other hand, we live in a world that exalts individualism above all else:**
  - So singles are told that they shouldn't **need** anyone else to be happy.
 

That it's good not to be tied down, so that you can pursue **your** dreams, and **your** desires, and nobody will get in **your** way.
  - So basically, culturally speaking, singles can't win.

**What does the Word say about Singleness and Marriage?**

- It is for this very reason that we must move on from listening to what the WORLD says about this topic and find out what the WORD says about singleness and marriage...
- And the first key lesson we will start with today is that biblically, **both singleness and marriage are good and a Gift from God.**

### **Both Singleness and Marriage Are Good and Gifts from God**

- Most people don't have any issue seeing marriage as good or a gift at least from a biblical perspective...
- **We know that God created marriage before sin entered the world.**
- In **Genesis 1:26-27** – we read that God created man and woman in his own image.
  - And in **Genesis 2:18**, ***<sup>18</sup> The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."***
  - We read that God BLESSED this union of one woman and one man and told them to be fruitful and multiply...
  - Again, all this happened before the sin entered the world at the Fall of Man.
- In **Hebrews 13:4**, we read that ***Marriage should be honored by all...***
  - And in **1 Timothy 4**, we read that anyone who teaches against marriage or discourages someone from marrying **is evil and is teaching a demonic lie.**
- Again, God instituted the covenant relationship of marriage between one man and one woman and said that it is good!

### **Singleness is a Good Gift:**

- Well, singleness is also a good gift from God!
- Some people may struggle with this truth that Singleness is Good, but that struggle is not biblical, it is culturally influenced, as we will see.
- Others may really struggle with the Gift of Singleness:
  - *For some it's like getting the gift that nobody wants at the Christmas gift exchange...*  
Everyone wondering where it is going to end up...
- But the fact remains, the New Testament is blatantly clear in calling **Singleness Good and a Gift.**
- Lets look. You can open with me to 1 Corinthians 7. We will start in verse 1.
  - I would advise keeping your Bible open to this chapter...

### **1 Corinthians 7:1, 6-8:**

***<sup>1</sup> Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry...  
<sup>6</sup> I say this as a concession, not as a command. <sup>7</sup> I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift (singleness), another has that (marriage). <sup>8</sup> Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.***

- So again, the text is clear...
  - Both singleness and marriage are called Good and are Gifts from God...

- This leads to the obvious next question... **WHY???** *It's because...*

### **Both Singleness and Marriage Display the Gospel**

- First, let's look at Marriage...
  - To do so, we are going to look at Ephesians 5.
  - It is helpful to read Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 7 in tandem with each other to get a fuller view of this topic.

- In **Ephesians 5:22-27**, we read:

***<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.***

***<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.***

- **So how does Marriage display the Gospel?**

- In marriage, the husband's sacrificial love for his wife should display Christ's sacrificial love for His church.

Where Christ laid down his life for the church, so a husband should be willing to do the same for his wife.

- Next, the wife's submission and respect to her husband should display the church's submissive obedience to Christ.

This is a beautiful picture of the gospel in marriage.

- **Where the world tells us that Marriage is to make us happy.**

- The gospel shows us that Marriage is to help make you holy.  
As Paul says, Husbands, present your wife holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word... so that she would be presented as a radiant church, without stain, wrinkle or blemish...
- Again a beautiful picture of exactly what Christ did for us, displayed in marriage.

- **So how does Singleness display the gospel?**

- Where the world would tell us that you need a husband or wife to complete you, **the gospel shows us that a Christian's ultimate identity is in Christ.**

That in Christ we find everything we truly need.

- That only in Christ do we find our true satisfaction and sufficiency...
- That to the true follower of Christ, He really is ENOUGH!

- **The gospel flies in the face of what our world says about singleness...**

- The gospel is this very good news about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
A person who lived his entire life a single man.
  - And he was no less of a man for being single...
- In fact, Hebrews tells us that Jesus was the only perfect man who ever lived.  
He was fully, perfectly human.

- He was complete, lacking nothing.
- Therefore, because Jesus is Good and Jesus literally is the Gospel...  
And since Jesus is our example for life and faith,
  - We must conclude that single adults cannot be seen as somehow less fully realized human beings than married persons.
 Ultimately, the Christian view of the gospel de-idolizes our cultural view of marriage.
  - And this in no way diminishes marriage.
    - Which brings up another key point.
- **Singleness display's the gospel as it shows the Christian's ultimate marriage is not with a spouse, but with Christ.**
  - And if you keep reading in Ephesians 5 passage we just looked at, in verse 31-32 Paul says:
 

***<sup>31</sup> "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup> This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.***
  - Paul here is showing us that the physical union experienced by a husband and wife is simply a shadow of the union that all those that are part of the true church have with Christ.  
That if you have biblically responded to the gospel, and have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord of your life by faith...
    - **You have been united with Christ!**
 And this is a profound mystery, says Paul.
    - That we are somehow mysteriously, mystically made one with the risen Christ.
    - Or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:17 - *he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.*
- *At this point you may be thinking?*
  - What about Genesis 2:18 – *Its not good for man to be alone...*  
And this is exactly the point I'm trying to make.
  - That if you are part of the true church, then you have been united with Christ and have been brought into the family of God, and you will never be alone again...  
**FOR ALL ETERNITY!!!!**
- This is a very important point that I don't want anyone to miss:
  - Your marriage relationship with your spouse IS NOT ETERNAL.  
Your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ are!
  - Jesus himself says in **Matthew 22:30** – *At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.*  
This is referring to eternity future...
- So, our marriage here on earth points us toward our eternal marriage with Christ.  
Theologically, our marriage on earth is a shadow of what is to come.
- **Next, Singleness not only display's the gospel, but it also enables the Christian to more freely advance the gospel of Christ.**

- Paul actually lists certain circumstances where Singleness is preferred to marriage for this reason...

So let's look at a few of them...

- **First, Because of Persecution:**

- In 1 Corinthians 7:26, we read: <sup>26</sup> *Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.*
- Many have debated what Paul is referring to when he says “**this present crisis.**”

The answer that makes the most sense in light of the rest of the book is the great persecution that the church was under and that was coming.

Within a few years of Paul's letters to Corinth, the Roman Emperor Nero would unleash an onslaught of persecution on the newly formed Christian religion.

- Where Christians would actually be captured and fed to animals in Roman stadium's for entertainment.
- So basically, Paul is saying, stay single if you are single during these difficult times so you do not have to worry about the safety of your family and can focus on the Lord's work he has appointed you to.

This might be similar to Paul saying to someone who is living in Darfur Sudan today to not marry because of the horrible conditions and persecutions our Christian brothers and sisters are living in there.

- **Paul also said that singleness can be preferred to marriage in these times so that your devotions will remain undivided.**

- In 1 Corinthians 7:35, we read: <sup>35</sup> *I am saying this for your own good (meaning to remain single), not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*
- Paul is really making a case for the undivided attention of the single man or woman to devote themselves to the mission of Christ for the advancement of His Kingdom on earth.

He makes a clear that it is okay to marry, and if you do marry, it is not sin.

- But he is saying there are some distinct advantages to singleness over marriage for the advancement of the Kingdom.
- That is why see countless major figures in the Bible that remained single, like: Well – Jesus, Paul, John the Baptist, many of the other apostles, the great evangelist Apollos, who we have seen in this book... and many others.

- **Finally, Paul says that Singleness can be preferred to marriage for the advancement of the gospel, if the single person can remain self-controlled and not burn with sexual desire:**

- In **1 Corinthians 7:8-9**, we read:

<sup>8</sup> *Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. <sup>9</sup> But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

- So basically, if you can be single and NOT burn with sexual desire, then stay single and advance the Kingdom of Christ for the sake of the Glory of God.



- But, if you can't remain self-controlled and you are "burning"...  
Paul is saying to pursue a spouse, get married, enjoy the gift of sexual relations with you spouse, which is how God intended it...  
Then go advance the Kingdom of Christ to the ends of the earth, for the sake of the Glory of God.
- Again, both singleness and marriage are good gifts from God.
  - And both powerfully display the gospel in different ways.  
And to exalt one over the other would simply be unbiblical...

### **Both Singleness and Marriage Are Under Attack**

- Next, because Singleness and Marriage are both Good and both Display the Gospel... **Both Singleness and Marriage Are Under Attack** from an adversary that knows exactly what he is doing...
  - Most Christians absolutely hate to talk about Satan, but we must not overlook the power and cunning of the evil one...
- ***Right now you might be thinking... Last time this guy preached he talked about Hell, now he's talking about Satan... Really?***
  - The answer is yes, it really is that important.

### **Screwtape Letters:**

- On Friday, Ani and I went to the play the Screwtape Letters, an amazing portrayal of CS Lewis' book.
  - It only speaking role was played by Max Mclean, the guy whose voice is used for pretty much every audio Bible you have ever heard.
- For those that have not read the book or seen the play, it is about a high ranking demon named Screwtape who is writing letters from hell to his nephew demon named Wormword on earth.
  - Screwtape is instructing Wormword how to attack, tempt, and lead astray the human that Wormword has been assigned to.  
It really was an incredible play.
- But arguably the most profound part of the night was not play at all, but the post play dialog that Max Mclean had with the audience.
  - After taking many questions from stage, he called for one more, and a lady asked, *"if you could tell people just "one thing" that you would want them to leave here with tonight, what would it be?"*
  - He said that he would want people to know and understand the reality of spiritual warfare.  
Because one Satan's greatest tactics is making the world think that he doesn't exist.
- Well friends let me tell you, he does exist and we must take Him seriously.  
And he hates it when the church talks about him.
- **And this is where I want to focus the rest of our time this morning...**
  - In 1 Corinthians 7, if you don't read carefully, it would be very easy to read right over of the top of this important point.
  - *That said, lets pick up text with every married man's favorite verse in the bible...*

In **1 Corinthians 7:5**, we read...

***<sup>5</sup>Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time*** (yes that means exactly what you think it means... ), ***so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.***

### **Cultural context of Corinth...**

- As we examine Paul's letters to Corinth, we see some striking parallels between their culture 2000 years ago and ours today...
  - One the most blatant parallels is Satan's outright attack on the hearts and minds of the people of God.
- Specifically, we see Satan's constant attack to undermine both **Purity and Maturity** of the church...
  - First, lets talk about Satan's attack on the purity of the church:  
We know that sexual immorality was rampant in the Corinthian church.
    - And unfortunately, we have the same is true today!
  - Sexual immorality is rampant in the church...  
And if you stop and think about it, it is clear to see Satan's hand in it.

### **Over-Sexualization of Culture:**

- Think about how Satan has orchestrated the over-sexualization of our culture.
  - And this is really where I want you to track with me...  
Lets look at the average age of marriage for example...
- 100 Years ago it was common for people to get married between 16-18 years old.
  - And lets just say that on average kids were going through puberty at around 13-14 years old.
  - So you would have young singles living their lives on average just 3 to 5 years while being sexually mature without being able to act on their sexuality in a healthy biblical way.  
Also, they were living in mostly rural, conservative, non-sexualized culture.
- ***Lets compare that to today... Now what are singles facing???***
  - Well today... the average marrying age for women is almost 27 years old and for men it is nearly 29 years old.
  - Also, there are studies that show that due to the chemicals in the food we eat and the constant visual sexual stimulation we are bombarded with in our culture, that puberty ages are actually decreasing...  
Thus, now children are going through puberty as early as 10 years old for girls and 11 for boys.
  - So now you have singles in our culture living their lives on average 15-20 years while being sexually mature and not being able to act on their sexual desires in a healthy biblical way.  
All in a culture that screams sex at them every time they turn around...
    - Or turn on the TV, look on the internet, or and advertisements...

### **Cohabitation:**

- And obviously people aren't waiting to have sex...



- What would be the point in that?
- Our culture says that sexual exploration and promiscuity is a completely normal and acceptable part of growing up.
- This shift in culture has led to dramatic decline in our cultures view of marriage.
  - Today, **4 out of 10** of couples that get married will live with each other before marriage.
  - Which again plays completely into our cultural mantra of instant gratification without commitment:
 

And the justification our culture uses for cohabitation before marriage sounds like a reason given by used car salesman...

    - You obviously wouldn't buy a car without taking it for a test drive first.

As someone who has been in young adult ministry for ten years... do you have any idea how many times I have heard that justification...
- Are you starting to see Satan's hand in this???

### **Transition to Epidemic of Pornography:**

- Maybe Satan's greatest masterpiece in his attempt to undermine the purity of the church is the **epidemic use of pornography**.
- Statistics tell us that 92% of this room above the age of 11 has viewed pornography at some point.
  - Statistics show us that pornography is not A issue undermining the purity of the church today. But it is THE issue undermining the purity of our church.
  - The most common users of Internet pornography are single 12 to 17-year-old boys.
 

Closely followed by every other male over the age of 17.

### **I Understand this Hurt:**

- Last week, Dr. Poplin examined how to judge within the body of Christ.
  - That we are to first remove the plank from our own eye before we remove the speck from our brother's eye...
- I tell you this because I preach to you today, *not* out of a place of judgment, but out of a place of empathy and burden, as someone who knows the tremendous weight of this sin.
  - There have been many times that I wish I could go back in time 22 years to the seventh grade boy that I was, who was about to be exposed to pornography for the very first time.
  - I wish I could tell him to run away from this sin as fast as he can.
  - I wish I could explain to that boy that the fascination and instant gratification he may get from this sin isn't remotely worth the consequences he will experience to his heart and soul.
  - I wish I could explain to him the power that this sin can have.
 

And that Satan will try to use this sin to undermine the good that God has in store for him.
  - I wish I could remove the images that have been seared into my memory.

And as any guy in this room will tell you if he honest, once they are in there, they are there to stay.

- I have had the opportunity to counsel many men on this issue throughout the years, and it is always the same story...
  - Feelings of shame, Unworthiness, and Hopelessness.
  - Also, talk to any guy that has struggled with pornography and ask him if the struggle went away when he got married... ***It didn't.***
- It's worth noting as well, that this is not just a sin that affects men.
  - Women now make up one third of pornography users in America.
  - And women are twice as likely to be engaged in internet chat rooms as men.
- My friends, Satan is good at what he does and he has been doing it a lot longer than we have...
  - But praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that...  
***"Greater is He who is in us than he that is in the world..."***

### **Satan Attacking the Maturity of the Church:**

- Next... throughout the book of 1 Corinthians, we see a common theme of people remaining in their youthful, selfish, worldly desires.
- In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul says to the church:  
***Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly —mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.***
  - *Later, we see Paul scolding the church for disorderly worship.*  
*For getting drunk on the wine that was to be used for the Lord's Supper.*
- Over and over again, this church shows its immaturity, living as spiritual infants.
  - And again, immaturity is an epidemic in the church today...

### **Delayed Adolescence:**

- Maybe the most common attack on maturity today is a problem now commonly referred to as **Delayed Adolescence**.
- People wonder why on average people are staying single later?
  - And the simple answer is, on average, they are not ready.  
The fact is, most young, single Christians are simply not mature enough to get married.
  - They think it is okay to stay living with Mom and Dad long after college is over.  
*Why get a job when I can work part time and mooch off of Mom and Dad?*
- **What people don't see is the fact that Satan is winning this battle:**
  - One of the foundational building blocks of our society is the health of the family...
  - ***Do you not think Satan knows this???***  
*So what does he do?*
  - He realizes that if he can keep our society immature and impure, he will undermine the family.  
So what does he do, he builds into our cultural value system the values of personal rights, entitlement, and instant gratification of all worldly pleasures.

And even more than that, he blurs the lines so much between the church and the world, that the two are often indistinguishable.  
And then he builds a fear within the church to not address such issues as sex, money and Satan...

- The last thing he wants us to do is call him out on it...
- But friends, we must realize that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but as Paul writes to the church in Ephesus...
  - We battle against, the powers and principalities and THIS PRESENT DARKNESS...

### **Fighting for the Purity and Maturity of our Church:**

- At this point, you may be thinking, Rob, I hear you talking about this attack from Satan, but what do we do about it???
  - And friends, let me be clear and let me be direct...  
**The simple answer is WE FIGHT BACK!**
- And you start by **Recognize you are in a Battle.**
  - At the risk of sounding like G.I. Joe... ***Knowing, really is half the battle!***
  - Throughout the scriptures we see Satan's attack on the people of God, and on our Lord Jesus himself.  
And they saw it for what it was... And do must we...
    - Do not turn a blind eye to this fight, or you will regret it.  
Again, Satan is very good at what he does and he has been doing it a whole lot longer than you.
- Next, **Pray on the Armor of God Daily:**
  - Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 how to **ready ourselves for battle with the Armor of God.**  
Pray that your feet would be shod with the readiness of the gospel.  
Pray on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the helmet of salvation.  
And take up the shield of faith to extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one, who will be doing everything he can to attack you.  
And finally, take up the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God...  
**AND FIGHT BACK!**
    - By doing this, you are literally praying on Christ and all the good gifts you have in him, which will prepare you for battle.
- Next, **Fight for your own Purity!**
  - Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:18 - ***18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.***
  - I know this is easier said than done, but let me just encourage you...  
Especially to the young men in the room, I know it is difficult, but don't even go their in the first place.
    - Just RUN and fast as you can away from this sin.
- Next, **Parents, Fight for the Purity and Maturity of your Children!**
  - Guard their eyes against things that will harm them.

Put the accountability software on your computer.

- Focus on raising up adults that will take personal responsibility for themselves and their future families.
- Allow them to see in the home what a healthy, godly, pure and mature walk with Christ looks like.

Model for them how you want them to turn out...

Model for them Christ!

- **Next, Help Each Other in the Fight:**

- Lets understand that to many in this room are deeply struggling with the issues addressed today.

Lets love each other well as we fight for our purity and maturity.

Lets show grace and forgiveness when people fall.

- Lets try to help keep each other from temptation:

Women, one simple piece of advice: dress modestly for your Christian brothers.

Us guys are very visual and it helps us out when you dress modestly.

- **Finally, as you Fight, Realize that God is with You in this Fight:**

- I encourage you to memorize **1 Corinthians 10:13** –

***<sup>13</sup> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.***

- I can't begin to tell you how many young people I have had memorize this verse.
- I would even recommend saying it in first person:

***<sup>13</sup> No temptation has seized **ME** except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let **ME** be tempted beyond what **I** can bear. But when **I** am tempted, he will also provide a way out so that **I** can stand up under it.***

You can rest in the promise of this verse...

- That God is FAITHFUL!
- He is for you. He is with you.
  - And He will provide you a way out.

## **Closing:**

- Friends, no matter if you are single or married, we are in a battle for the very hearts and minds of the people of God.
  - Let us constantly seek to point each other back to the only person that not only can win this battle, but the one who has already won the war...

The 33-year-old **single** man who died on a cross 2000 years ago for you and for me.

    - The person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Prayer**