

OUTLINE: SS, M&F, Advantages & Disadvantages of Singleness; Courting 4/30/23

NOTE: This outline is based on a chapter, “Singleness and Marriage”, in Timothy Keller’s book, The Meaning of Marriage. Due to COVID, I was unable to teach on 4/30. Thus, the class watched two video messages from RC Sproul’s series, “The Intimate Marriage”. One was on knowing your spouse; the other was on compliments and criticisms. This outlined lesson was supposed to be #10 in a series of 11 messages.

We can “*either over-desire or under-desire marriage, and either of those ways of thinking will distort (our) lives*” (p192).

1. The Goodness of Single Life

1Co 7:27-31 *Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman^[a] marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. ²⁹ This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.*

Jesus, the King, ushered in the kingdom of God in his first coming. God’s power to renew and restore the whole creation has broken into this present age. Yet, this present age, with its sin, devil, decay, disease, and death has not been removed. Thus, Christ’s followers live in “the overlap of the ages”. The kingdom has come, in measure. But we continue to pray and hope for the kingdom to come (in consummation).

The social and material concerns of this present age continue. And we give most of our awake hours to such concerns. But we are called to live as pilgrims. The new age has dawned. Christ is returning soon. That conviction should color the way we relate to the concerns of this present age. Our jobs and our marriages are very temporary. Soon, they will be done. In the age to come, the saints will not marry (Luke 20:35).

“Paul says it means that both being married and not being married are good conditions to be in. We should be neither overly elated by getting married nor overly disappointed by not being so—because Christ is the only spouse that can truly fulfill us and God’s family the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy us” (p194).

According to 1Co7, singleness may be the better way for a disciple to live in this world, at least in certain situations. Jesus and Paul were both single their entire lives. And Jesus was the perfect man, sinless (Heb. 4:15; 1Pe 2:22). *“The Christian gospel and hope of the future kingdom de-idolized marriage” (p195).* One can marry, but there are advantages to remaining single. But then, there are disadvantages as well. Jesus Christ, not marriage, is the believer’s

hope. “Christians’ inheritance is nothing less than the fullness of the kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth” (p196).

2. The Penultimate Character of Marriage

“Western culture tempts us to put our hopes in ‘apocalyptic romance,’ in finding complete spiritual and emotional fulfillment in the perfect mate...what matters in life is finding romance and marriage” (p197). Eph. 5, however, teaches that marriage itself is not ultimately about sex or social stability or personal fulfillment. Marriage was created to be a reflection on the human level of our ultimate love relationship and union with the Lord. It is a sign and foretaste of the future kingdom of God”. “Even the best marriage cannot by itself fill the void in our souls left by God. Without a deeply fulfilling love relationship with Christ now, and hope in a perfect love relationship with him in the future, married Christians will put too much pressure on their marriage to fulfill them, and that will always create pathology in their lives. If single Christians don’t develop a deeply fulfilling love relationship with Jesus, they will put too much pressure on their DREAM of marriage, and that will create pathology in their lives as well (p198).

3. The Strongest Tie on Earth is that which Binds in Christian Love and Community

Our tie in Christ is stronger than racial, national, and family ties.

1Pe 2:9-10 *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [Cf. Eph. 2:14f; 1Pe 4:17]*

4. The Goodness of Seeking Marriage

“Unlike our commitment-averse, postmodern society, Christianity does not fear or avoid marriage either. Adults in Western society are deeply shaped by individualism, a fear and even hatred of limiting options for the sake of others” (p201).

SOME PRACTICAL COUNSEL FOR MARRIAGE SEEKERS

1. Recognize that there are seasons for not seeking marriage.

Those that continually feel that they “need” someone have likely made an idol of marriage. Young people and young adults need to become emotionally and vocationally mature before seeking marriage. There are seasons of transition, a significant life change, and times of emotional upheaval or injury, in which one’s judgment can be clouded. There is wisdom in embracing the repeated counsel of Scripture, “WAIT upon the Lord”.

2. Understand the “gift of singleness”.

1Co 7:7 *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has **his own gift from God**, one of one kind and one of another. The NT uses the word “gift” to describe an ability that God gives to*

edify others. The Lord gave the apostle the ability to remain single so as to better serve the people of God. To most, he gives the ability to serve others through marriage. Having the gift of singleness does not mean that one is void of any struggle associated with singleness. Jesus had the gift, yet he was “tempted in all things, even as we are”, including sexual temptation and the temptation to feel unduly alone.

Author Donald Thomas draws attention to four benefits of singleness: 1) It is the best way to endure persecution (1Co 7:26); 2) It frees you from the troubles of marriage (1Co 7:28); 3) It can thus promote unhindered service to Christ (1Co 7:29); and 4) It allows for a single, focused life (1Co 7:32-35) [What’s Inside: Finding the Right One in Light of the Beatitudes, Ch. 14, “Happy are the Single!”]

3. *Get more serious about seeking marriage as you get older.*

Younger adults should not “awaken emotional and physical desires that can’t be fulfilled (responsibly, within marriage) for years to come” (p209). If, however, one is in their late 20’s or older, it’s recognized that “dating” has the prospect of marriage in view. Act your age.

4. *Do not allow yourself deep emotional involvement with a non-believing person (1Co 7:39).*

2Co 6:14. If Jesus is central to me, an unbeliever cannot understand me. If you marry an unbeliever, or are converted after marriage, you will have to lose a measure of transparency. Your spouse will not and cannot understand certain things about you. It would be worse, however, if one allowed Christ out of a central place in one’s consciousness.

5. *Feel “attraction” in the most comprehensive sense.*

Yes, physical attraction is an important aspect of what normally leads into a marital relationship. But “charm is deceitful and beauty is vain” (Pr. 31:30). Faces and figures fade with time. Cultivate a proper attraction to one’s character or spiritual fruit. “A woman who fears the Lord shall be praised” (Pr. 31:30). Be attracted by what a person is becoming, in Christ, and by what they one day will perfectly be. Learn to appreciate what it is about that person that moves them in a transcendent direction (music, books, places, etc.). Be drawn to their mission, the work(s) they want to do for Christ.

6. *Don’t let things get passionate too quickly.*

Sexual and romantic “obsession” can rise immediately. And that prevents one from obtaining a realistic assessment of someone. Lifetime love will necessarily involve far more than hot emotions. Can I appreciate someone and serve someone even when feelings are cold or dull? “*Idolizing my beloved—certainly a danger for the newly infatuated—is all about me, though it pretends to be all about the other, it is all about me because it does not take my beloved seriously as a person created and redeemed by God but rather imagines him to be perfect, heroic, sublime, and customized to meet my needs*” (pgs. 213-4). Serving together at church can be a means of getting to know one another realistically. Working through a conflict can be eye-

opening; likewise, having to repent and forgive. Have each of you shown the other that you can make changes out of concern for the other? Refuse to get sexually involved before marriage. Don't trigger deep passion before you have gotten a good look at her and she has gotten a good look at you.

7. *Don't become a faux spouse for someone who won't commit to you.*
8. *Get and submit to lots of community input.*

Marriage is too important to be a strictly individual, unilateral decision. Our own judgment is too easily skewed. The church has a deep interest in you, and indeed has made a deep investment in you. Married couples need to help singles to understand not only the joys of marriage but also its difficulties.