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Sermon Notes

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## God's Holy Gifts: Singleness and Marriage

### 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

Some of the deepest and most powerful questions in life have to do with love... with matters of the heart. The world is filled with love songs that reflect what a powerful force love is, and the expression of love in sexual desire is likened to a fire. The Bible is well aware of this power. And as we turn to 1 Corinthians 7, we turn to the most practical chapter in the New Testament on marriage and singleness... and do we ever need this wisdom!!

#### I. God's Beautiful Provision of Marriage

##### A. The Pattern Established by the Creator "At the Beginning"

***Matthew 19:4-6 "at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'<sup>5</sup> and said, '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>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."***

##### B. God's Delightful Purposes in Marriage

###### 1. Partnership

***Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."***

"Helper suitable" = perfectly suited for him; intellectual equal, equally in the image of God, able to share conversations, dreams, goals, relationship... patterned after the Trinity... "the two shall become one"... one = thinking the same thoughts, having the same goals, loving the same things, working together... FRIENDSHIP

###### 2. Pleasure

***Genesis 2:24-25 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.<sup>25</sup> The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.***

The Song of Songs celebrates the pleasure that comes from a holy sexual relationship between a husband and wife; it is one of the greatest

pleasures there is in this world, and God made marriage for that pleasure. This pleasure is so great, only poetry can capture it:

***Song of Solomon 8:6-7 Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. <sup>7</sup> Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.***

### 3. Procreation

***Genesis 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.”***

***Malachi 2:15 Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.***

Someday heaven will be filled with the redeemed from every tribe, language, people and nation... a multitude of people from all over the world, people in the image of God; God ordained marriage as the holy means by which human beings would be created and enter the world.

### 4. Purity

The context here, as we shall see, is Corinth as a swirling pot of sexual temptation. Constant allure toward sexual immorality of many types. God's one and only provision for pure sexual activity is MARRIAGE. We'll say much more about this, since it is clearly on Paul's mind here in 1 Corinthians 7

### 5. Protection

Strongly connected with purity is protection; the husband's body exists for the protection of the wife – sexually, lest she stray; but also protection for her in terms of food, clothing, shelter when she is vulnerable; especially in childbearing. He is to provide materially for his wife and children;

Similarly, the wife is there for the sexual protection of the husband; by her willing presentation of her body to him, she protects him from the harlots of Corinth; also by her industriousness, her skillful labors protect her husband and children from hunger and the cold... as the Proverbs 31 woman shows

Finally on protection, the family is under Satanic assault; it is primarily the husband's job to protect his family from every threat – physical and spiritual; but also the wife by her prayers and godly example and sexual willingness and her labors as a homemaker and in industrious and

profitable works, she protects him and her children from all Satanic assaults on their bodies and souls

***Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: <sup>10</sup> If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.***

Another aspect of the protection of marriage is that individuals are protected in the security of a permanent, life-long covenant. We promise that we will be together till death parts us. This forces us sinners to work out our problems because there is no other holy way out. We are secure in the permanence of the covenant.

#### 6. Productivity

God commanded the man and woman to take dominion over planet Earth; to subdue it and rule over it. That involved countless works of creativity and development. They were called on to do it together, each with their various roles, beginning with raising their children to join with them in that worldwide work. God gave marriage for productivity. Statistics bear out today that two are better than one financially as well – especially if there are children involved. Single-parent homes are one of the greatest single contributors to a multi-generational cycle of poverty.

#### 7. Portrayal

Marriage is the greatest portrayal or picture of the holy and perfect relationship between God and his people, between Christ and his church. Heaven includes a massive wedding banquet for the Son and his bride

***Ephesians 5:31-32 "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.***

C. We Should See Marriage as a beautiful gift from God... like the fragrant and fruitful Garden of Eden

***Song of Solomon 4:12-16 You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. <sup>13</sup> Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, <sup>14</sup> nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices. <sup>15</sup> You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon. <sup>16</sup> Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.***

## II. This Garden of Eden is Besieged

- A. However, Like the Original Garden of Eden, this Garden is in Danger... it is a walled city under direct Satanic assault
- B. Adam was Commanded to Guard the Garden

***Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to SERVE it and PROTECT it.***

Protect = like a watchman on the walls of a sleeping city; like a sentry guarding a post over a sleeping army near the frontlines

The image is one of DANGER and the need for CONSTANT VIGILANCE

Satan knows better than we do the terrifying power of a godly marriage... of a Christ-like husband loving his wife, of a godly wife submitting to her loving husband, of a godly father and mother raising their children in the Lord

That picture is a TERROR to his wicked Kingdom; so from the beginning, Satan has assaulted marriage

### C. The Unholy Corinthian Mess

1. The Greek-Roman world was deeply corrupt sexually and in marriage... we'll discuss this more in following weeks
2. We've already seen the corruption in the Corinthian church
  - a. Chapter 5: a man had his father's wife
  - b. Chapter 6: Paul warns against all patterns of sexual immorality as endangering the soul

***1 Corinthians 6:9-11 do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.***

- c. Chapter 6: Paul specifically addresses the pattern of sexual immorality with temple prostitutes

***1 Corinthians 6:15-20 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one***

*flesh." <sup>17</sup> But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. <sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

3. This is the context of 1 Corinthians 7: the Corinthian church was in constant danger sexually, and God was calling them to perfect holiness in sexual matters; holy celibacy and holy marriage are God's two great gifts in this area

#### D. Our Unholy Mess

1. Our context is every bit as messed-up in sex and marriage as the Corinthians'
2. We have lowered the view of sex to the point of single people "hooking up" with each other casually, committing fornication as lightly as though they were shaking hands
3. We have lowered the view of marriage by serial monogamy—divorce and remarriage, divorce and remarriage; so also adultery continues rampant in our day as it did in Paul's
4. Internet pornography is a constant assault on the minds and souls of BOTH men and women
5. So-called "gay marriage" is yet another attack on marriage; as our courts have thrown aside three millennia of legal understanding of marriage as one man, one woman in an exclusive covenant for life; in countries like Sweden and Holland where gay marriage has been the law for decades, marriage itself is denigrated and heading toward being obsolete among young people

E. WE ARE IN TROUBLE... and only the WORD OF GOD can sort this out

F. Paul Addresses the Questions the Corinthians Asked About Marriage... and in so doing gives us timeless and vital lessons that we must heed if we are to be holy

G. In the seething pot of sexual immorality of Corinth, God had established a HOLY COLONY... the Church of Jesus Christ in Corinth... but they had to be sexually holy and resist all these temptations

H. God's two great provisions for resistance: HOLY CELIBACY in singleness; and HOLY MARRIAGE; both are presented positively by Paul here, and both are presented as gifts from God

***1 Corinthians 7:7 each person has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.***

### III. God's Gift of Celibate Singleness

***ESV 1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."***

#### A. Addressing a Question They Asked

1. Paul has brought up issues HE HAD with them
  - a. Chapters 1-3: Their factions and divisions
  - b. Chapter 4: Their worldliness
  - c. Chapter 5: Their failure to discipline a sinning member
  - d. Chapter 6: Their lawsuit among believers
  - e. Chapter 6: Their sexual immorality in visiting temple prostitutes
2. Now he turns to address a series of topics THEY WROTE HIM about... beginning here with singleness and marriage

#### B. Their Stance Here: The Spiritual Superiority of Sexual Abstinence... Total Celibacy

***KJV 1 Corinthians 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.***

"Touch" is a euphemism for sexual relations; not talking about accidentally bumping into a woman in a crowded market; this touching clearly refers to sex:

***Proverbs 6:29 So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.***

1. Some Corinthian Christians, very aware of the depravity of their city and of the human heart, advocated a position of total abstinence from sex for everyone... it is UNIVERSALLY GOOD for a man not to touch a woman
2. This also fit into the Greek dualistic philosophical view of the purity of the spirit and the evil nature of the physical body
3. Paul doesn't disagree up front, because he is going to make a case for holy singleness later in this chapter, in verses 32-35
4. Even in this early section:

***1 Corinthians 7:7 I wish that all people were as I am. But each person has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.***

5. So, holy celibacy is a gift from God

6. BUT there are some caveats

C. If you don't have the gift of holy celibacy in singleness, you are IN DANGER SEXUALLY

***1 Corinthians 7:2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.***

1. When Jesus taught on divorce in Matthew 19 saying that marriage was a binding covenant FOR LIFE, some of his disciples reacted saying IT'S BETTER NOT TO GET MARRIED!!

***Matthew 19:11-12 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. <sup>12</sup> For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."***

2. There are some people to whom this gift of contented singleness is given... they do indeed live out the life of undistracted devotion to the Lord... the history of missions is FILLED with such people... like Lottie Moon, who walked away from a loving suitor to go serve the Lord in China; or Rachel Saint, who lived in contented singleness in serving the indigenous Huaroni tribe of Ecuador; so also Charles Simeon, the great Anglican preacher, and John Stott

3. However, Paul was very concerned that people who don't have the gift of singleness will be in DANGER of burning with sexual lust

***1 Corinthians 7:8-9 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.***

D. **Far Worse:** asserting that marriage itself is corrupt, and that true piety can only be found among virgins, those who have never had sex

1. Following Augustine's terrible struggle with sexual temptation as a pagan, after his conversion, he lived the rest of his life in total abstinence from sexual relations... he never married; furthermore, he strongly argued for the superiority of the celibate life

2. The Roman Catholic church made it a rule for all of its priests to be single... and esteemed virgin women who take a lifelong vow of chastity as the holiest of women; it also assigned a kind of second-grade piety to normal married Christian men and women

3. But Paul calls the forbidding of marriage a **doctrine of demons** in 1 Timothy 4:1-3
  4. Some other weird cults like the Shakers have forbidden marriage... they literally forbade all touching of any sort between the sexes
- E. We will speak more about singleness in later sermons... at the present, just let me say a few things
1. We should esteem single people as complete people in Christ... not defective or as if there's something basically wrong with them in that they can't find a spouse
  2. We should see the church as a large family of brothers and sisters, many of whom are single

***Psalm 68:6 "God sets the solitary in families."***

3. We should make special efforts to include single people in our family lives...
4. There should be a flourishing singles ministry in which single people can spend time together and minister to each other

IV. God's Gift of Holy Marriage

- A. However, Not Everyone Is Able to Maintain Sexual Purity... So Paul Turns to God's Gift of Marriage

***1 Corinthians 7:2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.***

- B. Again, this is not the only or even the best reason for marriage... because you can't control yourself sexually; however, it is the context here! Corinth was a sexual cesspool... and so is our world today

C. Sexual Provision

1. Each man should HAVE his own wife... and each woman should HAVE her own husband
2. This is God's gracious and loving gift to each other

- D. Celibacy within Marriage is NOT GOOD... but a temptation from Satan

***1 Corinthians 7:3-5 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup> The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. <sup>5</sup> Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, 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.*

1. Some in Corinth were extending the commitment to sexual abstinence necessary in the single life over to the married life
2. They were advocating that now that they were Spirit-people, in Christ their need for sexual relations within their marriage was OVER
3. Paul strongly argues against that view... and he does so with remarkably EGALITARIAN LANGUAGE... the husband and wife are sexual equals
4. He goes so far as to say the husband's body does not belong to himself alone, but he has given rights and privileges in the sight of God to his wife... that's the theological implication of being ONE FLESH
5. So also the wife's body does not belong to her alone, but she has given rights and privileges in the sight of God to her husband
6. That's what verse 3 means... the husband is under MORAL OBLIGATION to sexually fulfill his wife's needs, and the wife is under equal moral obligation to sexually fulfill her husband's needs

John MacArthur:

“There are so many people who use the sexual aspect of marriage to manipulate what they want. If the husband doesn't do everything the wife wants, that's it, ... he's on the couch. Or if the wife doesn't do everything the husband wants, he doesn't even bother with her. And the husband knows just exactly what he has to do to get the right response. So, he does it. Like sort of like a poor little puppy dog who has to do what he has to do in order to get what he has to get.

Listen, when you withhold from your partner for any reason, you put that partner in a place where Satan will tempt them toward their lack of self-control. The first thing that happens is not only the bitterness, anguish and anxiety that comes between the two, but then the evil thought that comes into the mind, and then the entertainment of the evil thought, and very often it can lead to an adulterous situation. Any time you withhold from your partner that which is rightfully theirs, you become the agent of Satan.

E. Occasional Times of Prayer... Maybe

1. Paul concedes there may be occasional times in which a married couple may fast from sex so that they can focus on prayer

2. And again, note how egalitarian it should be: BY MUTUAL CONSENT... if one of the two says “No”, then don’t do it, even for the benefit of prayer
3. And if you DO, he says these times should be brief and it should end with the couples coming together sexually so that Satan would not have the opportunity to tempt you
4. This gives a clear sense of how important a regular and healthy sexual life is in maintaining a healthy and holy marriage

F. Paul’s Concession is Not a Command!

***1 Corinthians 7:6-7 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, another has that.***

## V. Applications

### A. See Both Singleness and Marriage a GIFT FROM GOD

1. FBC should be a place where single people feel welcomed and esteemed as complete and full members of the Body of Christ
2. So also single people should see their time of singleness as that... a gift from God which enables you to serve Christ in ways not possible as a married person
3. On the other hand, you married people should see your spouse as a GIFT FROM GOD
  - a. Express your thankfulness to God regularly for your spouse... and express it to your spouse as well
  - b. Husbands, make your wives feel like they are a gift from God to you... live that thankfulness out day after day; let her not feel she is your biggest mistake, your biggest regret
  - c. Wives, do the same for your husbands... express openly the thanks you have for your husband

Anne Bradstreet, New England Puritan poet

If ever two were one, then surely we.  
 If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;  
 If ever wife were happy in a man,  
 Compare with me ye women if you can.  
 I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,  
 Or all the riches that the East doth hold.  
 My love is such that rivers cannot quench,

Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.  
Thy love is such I can no way repay;  
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.  
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere,  
That when we live no more we may live ever.

I yearn to be the kind of husband my wife could write that about.

B. Come to Christ!

1. Holy singleness is a gift... holy marriage is a gift; but salvation is a greater gift than both and makes both of them possible
2. Our battle with sexual sin is part of a larger battle we all have with ALL sin, all violations of God's holy law
3. We all deserve eternal condemnation in hell, not just for our sexual sins but for all the ways we have failed to live for the glory of God
4. God in his infinite love for sinners sent Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, to die on the cross for us
5. If you repent of sin and turn to Christ in the abandon of faith, God will forgive you completely and adopt you into his eternal family
6. Then he will give you the next gift... the indwelling Holy Spirit to be with you forever, to change you from the inside out.
7. The gift of Jesus as your Savior and the Spirit as your transforming power is all you will need to live a holy happy life in this world and be welcomed into heaven in the next world