

## The Christian and Singleness<sup>1</sup>

by Jack C. Whytock

As a part of our series on God's Design for Marriage and Family Life, we are going to deal with the whole topic of the Christian and singleness. Singleness is often spoken of in Scripture, yet so often we in the church are extremely or even exclusively family oriented. We exclude singles, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the way we conduct the life of the church. I would like to challenge all of us, through this brief message, to consider the place and the privilege of the Christian single person.

**Singles fall into many categories.** There are those who are single by choice. We will look at the most classic scriptural example of this a little further on in our discussion – the Apostle Paul. Secondly, there are those who are single by circumstance. They are open to the possibility of marriage, in fact desiring to be married, but have not found a suitable partner. Thirdly, there are those who become single again after the death of a spouse. Finally, there are those who become single again as a result of divorce.

As married people it is very easy for us to make judgment, even if it is never verbalized. We may think, "I wonder what is wrong with them that they are still single?" Or, "They couldn't possibly understand what I'm going through – they've never been married." Or, "Their marriage ended in divorce; that would never happen to me. I can't believe the mess some people get into." Or, "I don't think I'll invite her to come. Her husband is dead now, and she might feel out of place with all married people." Allow me to address some of these misconceptions and remind us again of the high esteem in which Scripture holds the single life – and thus challenge us to do the same.

We must begin by recognizing that **marriage must be kept in perspective.** One can be very complete without being married. In 1 Corinthians 7:7, 8 Paul writes these words, "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. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am." Paul is a great example of one who found full freedom and completeness in attending upon the Lord without distraction. He realized the advantages of singleness. He shows great contentment. Consider verse 7a – he wishes everyone else was like him. He is not just accepting singleness; he



---

<sup>1</sup> This is an abridgement of a sermon preached at Mt. Zion Presbyterian Church, Moncton, NB, Canada in 1992. It then was part of a printed leaflet series, "The Christian and ...". It was Leaflet Number One in the series (1993). Only slight amendments have been made to it here from its original published form.

is saying it's the best state there is! Singleness is never the state of being a second class Christian.

Consider the example of Jesus. J. I Packer wrote, "By His words and by His own unmarried life, Jesus showed that marriage was not an end in itself, nor was it essential to the wholeness of a person. As God's servant, a person might not be called to have a mate and children."

There is a common yet false notion that marriage may be the answer to all of life's problems. Packer writes, "Marriage will not answer all our problems. . . . We should not make the mistake of thinking that marriage will provide the ultimate satisfaction for which we all hunger . . . only God satisfies the hungry heart." Consider Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Who will give rest to the burdened? – Jesus Christ. This is not the blessing of those who are married only; it is the blessing of every child of God, and it comes from knowing Christ and abiding in Him. Turn to Jeremiah 6:16, "This is what the Lord says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.'" Again, we find that the answer to our problems, our weariness, our burdens is not found in marriage but in abiding in Christ. Marriage then must be kept in perspective and not thought of as a solution to all of life's trials.

The Bible clearly states that both marriage and singleness are good. Scripture tells us that the single can be freed up to serve the Lord in a way that the married person is not free. Read 1 Corinthians 7:32-35:

*<sup>32</sup> I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—<sup>34</sup> and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. <sup>35</sup> I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

The single life is not a curse. It contains blessings and is affirmed by the Apostle Paul.

**What then do we say to a single person who is convinced that they are not called to a lifetime of singleness?** First of all, there are biblical principles for choosing a marriage partner. Secondly, there are biblical principles for making the most of the single state that you are currently in. Thirdly, if you desire to marry, then wait, pray and prepare. Let's expand on all three of these important biblical principles

**First, there are biblical principles for choosing a marriage partner.** In 2 Corinthians 6:14 we are warned not to be unequally yoked. That is, a Christian is not to marry a non-Christian. Some things do not match. Imagine a three-legged race at a family picnic. A father is matched with his four-year-old son. They race toward the finish line, but they stumble and fall because their size and stamina are so unequal. They are mismatched. This is an amusing example, but a mismatched, unequally yoked couple is never amusing. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us, "Biblical principles put brakes on relationships we might otherwise have begun or

continued . . . .” An unequal relationship begins long before marriage. The Christian single must establish clear guidelines of whom he or she will even allow themselves to be interested in dating. Our feelings will lead us astray; god’s Word must be brought to bear on every situation. God never asks us to act against His Word, the Bible. If you are asking God if you should date this lovely, eligible, polite man or woman who is “at least sympathetic to Christianity”, the answer is no! Remind yourself that the Bible call this relationship “unequal”. **Refuse to allow your feelings to lead you out of God’s clear will.**

We must remember that marriage is “covenantal companionship”. Consider 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.’” And Genesis 2:24, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Therefore, if you are considering a relationship or are currently in a dating relationship, ask yourself these questions:

1. Are we spiritually companions and is this person capable of spiritual fellowship with me?
2. Do I know what to look for in a spouse?
3. Will this individual fulfill their role in marriage and home life?
4. Does this person understand that marriage is an exclusive relationship whereby we leave permanently all others and cleave together until death parts us?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no”, then heed the warning of Scripture concerning those who enter into an unequally yoked marriage – it is *not* the will of God.

Now secondly, just as there are principles for marriage, **there are also principles for the single life.** Singleness must be seen as a gift for a specific purpose. Just as marriage is a gift, so too is the single state. This does not mean that by accepting singleness, you are declaring yourself permanently single. However, if for a period of your life you are single, then consider the contribution you might have in the body of Christ at this point in your life.

Single Christians can make great contributions. Turn to Isaiah 54:1,

*“Sing, barren woman,  
you who never bore a child;  
burst into song, shout for joy,  
you who were never in labor;  
because more are the children of the desolate woman  
than of her who has a husband,”*

*says the Lord.*

Also see Isaiah 56:4-5.

*For this is what the Lord says:*

*“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant—*

*<sup>5</sup> to them I will give within my temple and its walls*

*a memorial and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that will endure forever.”*

Here we find promises of blessing far greater than children for the faithful single person. Single people can share their lives, their homes, their possessions. They can discipline themselves to show prayerful responsibility for others and take on others as “spiritual sons and daughters”.

Sun Moon said that the sign of success is to marry and have descendants. Christians have been guilty of functioning like moonies!! Isaiah 54:1 tells us of spiritual descendants and rebukes us by declaring that **faithful singles will have a name and heritage greater than sons and daughters.**

Some Christians throughout history have declared themselves single for life in order that they might devote themselves more fully to the work of the gospel. In Matthew 19:12, Jesus explains this when he says, “. . . and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. the one who can accept this should accept it.” That is, they are voluntarily celibate. This is not a higher level of holiness It is a gift from God to accomplish His purposes. Examples of this type of calling in our generation are John Stott of London, England and William Still of Aberdeen, Scotland. Both of these men have had a vast impact upon lives of hundreds of Christians and have been freed up to devote themselves fully to this work.

You may be saying, “But at some point I would still like to marry.” That is fine and is a reasonable statement. However, the principle for living the single life *while you are single* remains: use this time in your life to devote yourself to the work of the Lord and make the most of the freedom you have as a Christian single. Steve Schlissel of Messiah Reformed Church writes, “. . . singles must attend to their callings under God daily. God may bring them a spouse in the future or He may not. But today you are single and today you must serve.”

We turn then to a final word to the Christian who is not convinced that they are called to a lifetime of singleness. Every Christian at some point faces this question, “Does the Lord want me to marry and where do I find this person?” The answer to how to deal with this question can be summed up in three words – **wait, pray, prepare.**

**Wait.** This is a difficult concept for the twentieth century Christian. We want instant everything. Isaiah 28:16b reminds us, “He that believeth shall not make haste.” A. W. Tozer wrote these words, “God is not in a hurry. He is a Patient Craftsman as he shapes lives into the image of His Son . . . .” We all must learn to wait upon providence. We are sometimes unwilling to bow to the sovereign providences of God in our lives. We become frustrated with God. As you wait, remember that it is not wrong for a single person to desire or to seek marriage. Jay Adams writes, “God never calls His children without providing them the help that they need to accomplish His will and the ability to be happy doing it.” *But*, the doctrine of providence must not be ignored.

This leads to our second directive – **pray**. Come honestly and humbly before the Lord asking Him to grant you the desires of your heart. Pray that He will use you as a single Christian and help you to prepare to meet that person that He may by grace be preparing you to marry. Be confident that your heavenly Father loves you and hears you and desire to do a great work in you and through you.

Finally, **prepare**. Do we pray for our daily bread and then just sit at home waiting for someone to come and serve it to us? No!! We go out and seek work in order to provide for our daily needs, realizing that God gives us the ability and the opportunity to labour in order that our physical needs might be met. In the same way, the Christian single who desires to marry must “work” or “prepare” toward that end. Develop your abilities for marriage. Consider what skills you may need to bring into a marriage and work on these, whether it is household duties, cooking, child rearing, budgeting, etc. Prepare yourself in as many areas as possible. Develop also in your attractiveness. Perhaps you need to improve in this area – weight loss or gain, better hygiene, more attention to style. This does not mean God cannot send you a partner if you are lacking in one of these areas, but continue to develop attractiveness as one aspect of marriage preparation. Finally, develop your Christian life. As you draw closer to God, there will be a new beauty and attractiveness about you to a fellow Christian single. Those who are also deeply committed to the Lord will sense your developing relationship with Him.

Christian single, press toward your goal. If you expect God to send you a marriage partner, then wait in confidence for Him to work. He may still want to prepare you in ways that you cannot understand. **Wait, pray, prepare** and look to the day when God may marvelously introduce you to the man or woman of His choosing.

### **Sources consulted and for further reflection:**

- Adams, Jay. *Christian Living in the Home*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972.
- Atkins, Anne. *Split Image: Male and Female After God's Likeness*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987.
- Berry, Jo. *Beloved Unbeliever: Loving Your Husband into the Faith*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Making Your Life a Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984.
- Cantore, Stefan. “Being Single – or is singleness biblical?” *Evangelicals Now* (October, 2003):13.
- Clarkson, Margaret. *So You're Single!* Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw, 1978.
- Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Discovering God's Will*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982.
- Packer, J. I, Merrill C. Tenney and William White, Jr., eds. *Daily Life in Bible Times*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

- Piper, John. Foreword to “For Single Men and Women (and the Rest of Us)”. In *Recovering biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, xvii-xxviii. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991.
- Schlissel, Steve M. “City Singles”. *Urban Mission*, vol. 3 (September, 1985): 26-31.  
Reprinted also in *Christian Renewal* (February 1, 1993): 14-15.
- Searle, David. “Singleness”. In *Truth and Love*, ed. David Searle, 57-69. Carlisle/Edinburgh: Rutherford House/Paternoster, 1997.
- Thomas, Geoff. “Singleness”(August 2, 2006). Available on Banner of Truth website:  
[http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article\\_detail.php?1110](http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?1110) .