

## Ambition and Contentment 1 Corinthians 7

Introduction: The “abnormality” of singleness

### I. A Brief History of Singleness: The Swinging of the Pendulum

- A. OT Judaism: No place for singles
- B. Early and Medieval Church: Singleness is Superior
- C. Reformation Era: Marriage is Superior

II. **Modern Myth:** *Singleness should be regarded as a transitional state en route to the ultimate destination of marriage. Problems stemming from the “incompleteness” of singleness are resolved by marriage.*

### III. Jesus’ Elevation of the Status of Singleness – Alongside Marriage (Matthew 19)

- A. His example – Jesus was a never-married adult.
- B. His teaching
  - 1. About salvation: It is not secured through offspring but through faith in Christ. Our hope is not in our progeny but in our resurrection (see Matthew 22:23-33).
  - 2. About marriage: Because Jesus fulfilled the procreational goal of Jewish marriage and established a spiritual family which supersedes the biologically-defined people of God, human marriage is optional, secondary, significant, and temporary.
  - 3. About singleness: it may be a preferable choice for some because of the positive potential for service to God (Matthew 19:1-12).

### IV. Paul’s Elaboration on Jesus’ Instruction (1 Corinthians 7)

- A. Background
  - 1. The issue: there were people within the Corinthian church who were promoting sexual abstinence as a means of advancing their standing before God.
  - 2. The reason: The Greek dualistic worldview that viewed “spirit” as good and “matter” as evil.
    - a. Hedonists: advocated fleshly indulgence and employment of temple prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:12-20)
    - b. Ascetics: promoted rigorous self-denial and abstention from fleshly indulgence for purposes of spiritual advancement (1 Cor. 7).
  - 3. The probable question: Paul, do you agree with the ascetics that all Christians should refrain from sex?

#### B. Outline

*Part 1: Counsel to the Married and Previously Married (1-16)*

- a. For the married: Maintain sexual relations (1-7)
- b. For widowers and widows: Stay unmarried, unless you lack self-control (8-9)
- c. For Christian married couples: No divorce (10-11)
- d. For Christians married to unbelievers: Stay in the marriage (12-16)

*Part 2: General Rule: Remain As You Were When Called (17-24)*

*Part 3: Counsel to the Never-Married and Widowed (25-40)*

- a. For the never-married: Remain as you are (25-38)
- b. For widows: Remarriage permitted; though happier unmarried (39-40)

### C. Paul's Reply to the Corinthians Question

1. The short answer: \_\_\_\_\_ (7:1-5)
2. The answer to the question-behind-the-question: Rather than being in a hurry to \_\_\_\_\_ one's circumstantial status, the believer should first learn how to live out his \_\_\_\_\_ as a servant-steward of Christ in the life situation he was in at the time of \_\_\_\_\_ (7:17-24)

### C. Singleness and the Will of God: Principles

1. Like other life situations, one's marital status at any given time is determined by the \_\_\_\_\_ of God.
2. Throughout the course of one's life, one's "assignments" are subject to \_\_\_\_\_ – sometimes through personal \_\_\_\_\_.
3. One's responses to his/her life situations must be directed by the *moral* will of God and \_\_\_\_\_. Practical wisdom aims to . . .
  - avoid \_\_\_\_\_
  - maximize \_\_\_\_\_
  - manage \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Whatever one's present life "assignment," the provisions of God's grace are sufficient . . .
  - (1) to handle the \_\_\_\_\_ attending it,
  - (2) to live in \_\_\_\_\_ to the moral will of God,
  - (3) to produce \_\_\_\_\_ growth toward Christlikeness, and
  - (4) to fulfill one's vocation as a \_\_\_\_\_ of God's resources for the advancement of his kingdom.
5. As one responds to the current particulars of sovereign will of God, God's moral will calls the believer to \_\_\_\_\_ the opportunities inherent in those circumstances to the glory of God.

### D. Applications of Principles for Decision Making

1. Christian single adults have the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to make marital decisions.
2. While marital decisions are not dictated by the moral will of God, they are \_\_\_\_\_ by it. Regardless of status, believers are obligated to know and \_\_\_\_\_ the relevant rules.
3. The factors that need to be weighed in marital decision making must be judged by \_\_\_\_\_. As with all non-commanded decisions, each option has \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. For contemporary singles, Paul's admonition to "remain as you are" might be aptly paraphrased, "Don't be in too big a \_\_\_\_\_ to get married."
5. In weighing the pros and cons of singleness and marriage, Christians should place a priority on their \_\_\_\_\_ to God.
6. It is perfectly legitimate for those who hope to get married to take \_\_\_\_\_ that might lead to that outcome.
7. For as long as one is unmarried, the single adult should cultivate the complementary attitudes of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in carrying out the ministry functions of singleness.
  - a. Ministry functions: vocational \_\_\_\_\_ and relational \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Ministry attitudes:
    - 1) \_\_\_\_\_ (Phil. 4:11-19; 2 Cor. 12:7-12)
    - 2) \_\_\_\_\_ (Mat. 6:33).