

XVIII. God's Blueprint in Biblical Perspective
Foundations From Genesis
"Biblical Masculinity and Femininity and Singleness – Part 3"
I Corinthians 7
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April 3, 2022 • Sunday Evening Sermon

This will be the last study on the theology of singleness for the Christian man and for the Christian woman. It is Biblical masculinity and Biblical femininity expressed in singleness by establishing a theology of singleness. Some of our singles might get lethal on me if I mess this up so I will be careful as to how I communicate this. In God's providence I served the Lord as the pastor of a little Bible church that the Lord blessed to grow and when we started it was over half full of singles, because we were surrounded with a number of colleges there in Chattanooga, Tennessee. They had a singles retreat and I was asked to deal with this matter of singleness. I used material that really shaped my Biblical understanding of this that dates all the way back to the 1970s, but God's Word abides forever and is still true so I have somewhat reworked it but I want to thank Pastor Al Martin who mentored me back in the 1970s. I have used his material and have continued to work on it and rework it. This material covers how to look at singleness through God's Word. How do we see things as God has ordained them and established them? You have to take a look at in the context and flow of the Scripture.

There is this flow in the Bible of creation, the fall, redemption and then consummation. Remember this flow as you theologically examine things in the Scriptures. In other words, how did God in creation establish this phenomenon of singleness? How did the fall effect it? How does redemption restore it, redeem it and reconcile us in the context of that particular phenomenon or category of life? Then in the consummation, what will it be like in eternity? In our last study we went through the creation and fall where singleness was concerned.

I gave three statements on creation which were concerning a theology of singleness. The first was in the creation account perpetual singleness is absent. The second statement was in the creation account temporary or preparatory singleness is present. In other words, Adam has a period of time (not known) in which he was single and alone. In order for him to accomplish the creation mandate the Bible said it wasn't good for him to be alone in terms of his call in creation to the glory of God to subdue the earth, have dominion over it and be fruitful and multiply, but he was for a time single and God used that in order to bring to him a wife. Eve was single as well until God then brings her to Adam. The third statement is, given the above two statements, therefore it would be reasonable to assume that without the fall and the Divine judgment upon sin at the fall, as well as the presence of sin in today's existence, perpetual singleness would have continued to be absent. In other words, perpetual singleness only appears after the fall.

Would God have ordained a perpetual singleness? Certainly, that could have been a fact therefore I'm not saying the only way we see perpetual singleness is as a result of the fall, the curse of sin and sin's continued effects in society so that perpetual singleness becomes a reality to address for the glory of God. Temporary singleness would have continued as a husband and wife had children who would be single for a temporary time until they find a spouse as children come through the process of maturity. There seems to be no reality of anticipated perpetual singleness apart from the reality of the fall.

Now let's go to the fall. While it would be careless to declare axiomatically without the fall and the consequences of sin perpetual singleness would be absent, it can be said that the fall

has clearly produced functional causes resulting in perpetual singleness which has exacerbated the reality of perpetual singleness as a factor of life. So, that is present as well.

In the last study I gave you ten effects from the fall that contribute to perpetual singleness. There is violence and war. There is an uneven impact between male and female in the area of war. We have a mortality table whereby men die before women do. One of the blessings of the second wave feminism is now women are dying quicker so that gap is being shortened. We could go further if we look at personality and the effects of sin, about unbiblical views of marriage in terms of idolatry or fear, the broken family and what it anticipates in the lives yet to come.

What is God's solution? That is redemption. Whenever sin has produced something in this world then God has a solution that comes through the administration, the proclamation and the power of the Gospel itself. Now we will look at the redemptive application of the Gospel and how that effects the way we deal with singleness in the body of Christ among ourselves and with one another in the Lord. I want to give you three statements about this.

The first one is there are benefits and advantages to be embraced in perpetual singleness that God's redemption brings to us as Christians. In other words, a Christian who finds themselves in what seems to be a status of singleness there are benefits and advantages that God gives them in the power of the Gospel. An example would be that God can not only take us from our sins but in the power of Gospel He transforms us so that we are forgiven in our sins and when He redeems us from some of our besetting sins, those besetting sins actually become a ground work from which He develops an effective life for Christ. We see this is one who has been set free from addictive sexual behaviors or alcohol or eating, where He turned their greatest failings, their greatest rebellion into great instruments whereby they begin to counsel others with the same issues currently. They comfort them with the comfort that comforted them and they are able to minister to them.

It does not say that sin is profitable. It does say that redemption is so powerful it can take even the greatest sins of the greatest sinners and turn them around in terms of great statements of the power of the Gospel in repentance and transformation. For instance, like a religious terrorists becoming the greatest church planter who has ever lived and his name is the Apostle Paul. He was a man that killed Christians and then becomes the greatest evangelist with the greatest heart for evangelism. There are many examples of this. I am not saying one is single because of their sin. Our sins could contribute to our perpetual singleness and an example might be people who look at one struggling with besetting sins and they don't want to be tied to that for the rest of their life. That is a reality but it is wrong to assume that someone seen in a state of perpetual singleness is directly related to their personal sins. That judgement is not ours to give.

Sometimes God takes that status of singleness and uses it in ways that we are astonished by and that is why I want to give some benefits that redemption brings when we embrace God's calling in our life to extended singleness. I want to give you three areas of blessing in perpetual singleness that when our contentment is in the Lord, can be embraced in our lives and I am taking this from I Corinthians 7. The Apostle Paul brings our attention to this.

I want to first point out in the first verse of I Corinthians 7:25 the word betrothed in the New American Standard version says virgin which is referring to someone who is not yet married. They could be committed in marriage, as we would say today, engaged, but they are not yet married or have consummated the marriage, but this also could include people who are not yet engaged/betrothed. Virgin refers to someone who is not yet married and the reason this is said is because sex belongs only in marriage. The marriage bed initiates, recreates and

procreates the marriage. So, a single person is either single or betrothed (engaged) so this is referring to anyone outside of the consummated marriage covenant for that's how God ordained it from creation. Perhaps you are one who is single but has had sex outside of marriage and this is where you must embrace the Gospel at two points. One is you are forgiven if you repent of your sins. Secondly, whatever it was that brought you into that sinful relationship of a sexual relationship outside of marriage, God's power can now give you the ability to now live differently with devotion to God's Word. Let's look at I Corinthians 7.

I Corinthians 7:25-29 says *[25] Now concerning the betrothed (virgin), I have no command from the Lord* (this isn't coming from God's revealed will and it doesn't mean it's not God's revealed will, it has not already been found in the sacred writ but Paul as an Apostle gives us a command of the Lord even though it doesn't come from a command already given), *but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. [26] I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. [27] 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 marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles (cares), and I would spare you that.*

If someone tells you that if you're serious about Jesus then don't get married, the Bible identifies that as a doctrine of demons – abstaining from marriage – because it's a higher plain of spirituality. Paul is giving pastoral counseling to the present distress. It's easier to die for Jesus if I know I'm not leaving a wife and children behind. It's easier for me to take a trip, a mission's trip if I'm not leaving behind my wife with whom I made a vow to dwell with. Paul is saying in light of this burgeoning movement of the Gospel, the current persecution, this present distress, he is giving us some pastoral advice. Paul is going to be very specific as to why he gives this advice in this moment.

Then he says if you do get married you have cares and concerns that will have to be addressed in decisions of life. If I'm not married, I won't have to address those concerns. The rationale is that if you are not married you would not have to deal with the worldly trouble or cares that come with being married. Let's continue in the text.

I Corinthians 7:29-31 says *[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.*

In other words, all the things that the Lord has established are good. You haven't sinned if you're married but consider in this present distress the advantages of extended singleness. Paul will be clear for he will say if you don't have the gift to be single then you don't embrace it by deliberation. You may have to deal with it in contentment but you don't take it by vows. Celibacy is a gift to embrace, not a vow declaring superior spirituality. So here is a call Paul is telling us to give consideration to.

Here is an example. I have had so many opportunities to engage in short term mission trips around the world since I have been married and had kids, but I made a commitment that except for once a year where I would go for two weeks, I would never make a commitment to a mission's trip that extended beyond three days. There were multiple reasons I did this. One, is I am supposed to dwell with my wife. Two, I need my wife's presence for my own pursuit of holiness and for my desire to help her pursue holiness. Three, is I have children that I have to parent and I have to make those decisions. Now that my kids are grown and married those kinds

of decisions have now been set aside for me, but I am still married to my wife. When you have covenantal vows in marriage and in parenting that effects every decision you make in ministry.

In the consummation we will not be marrying or giving in marriage, but in this present age, this present distress if I can embrace perpetual singleness it offers up advantages which are not being encumbered by the worldly cares that are before you. In the meantime, you fulfill your responsibilities (your calling to minister) while you live unrooted in this world, yet fulfilling your priorities and vows. In other words, I don't live for this present age and I don't fulfill the vows I've made in my life as if they are the final fulfillments in my life. It's a challenging thing to understand but that's what Paul is telling us. You don't abandon your covenant vows as a spouse, a parent, or as a member of a local church. You also are to work. All those responsibilities are not your point of worship or your point of ultimate devotion. You are ready to lose your life for Christ's sake no matter what. I am not rooted in the idolatry of my responsibilities in this present age, but unrooted from that even though I'm responsible before God to fulfill those.

Then if I find myself in a position of perpetual singleness then I can embrace this moment for the advantages it gives. I can go on more short term mission trips. I can go to someone's house to read with them. I can take on five people to disciple instead of two. I have that surplus of time and now I can steward more of my time for the Kingdom. Here are the spiritual advantages of perpetual singleness for your growth in the Lord. In this state of singleness you have certain access to time, talents and treasures that you can redirect for spiritual reasons. As you live your joy and sorrow are not dictated by this present age, for your joys and sorrows are related to your relationship with the Lord and extending the Kingdom through your family, if you're married and then into the lives of others whereby certain responsibilities you will not have if you're not married and will have more time for evangelism, discipleship, missions, etc. Let's continue in the text.

I Corinthians 7:32-35 says [32] *I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. [33] But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, [34] and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. [35] I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*

Paul is not saying don't get married but he is telling singles here to take advantage of the moment if you're unmarried to further the Kingdom. I want to give you two examples in the Bible of how this is seen in reality. The first is from Luke 2. Here Joseph and Mary are fulfilling the law as they are bringing Jesus as a baby to the temple, coming up from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. They met with a man named Simeon but also met with someone else.

Luke 2:36-38 says [36] *And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, [37] and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. [38] And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of Him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

Anna was married, lived with her husband seven years, clearly, he died and she then lived as a widow all the way to age 84. What did she do during the time her husband died to the age of 84? She didn't engage in self-pity. She ceased the moment for the advantages it would offer

spiritually. She took that time she would have rightly devoted to her husband if she was still married, and now that she finds herself in a perpetual state of singleness uses the time for advantages spiritual growth and spiritual ministry. She does evangelism, diaconal ministry, servant ministry, ministry in word and deed, teaching, praying and fasting, for she is doing all the things appropriately in Biblical paradigm precepts as she is engaging. Perhaps you are thinking this is more Old Testament since Jesus has just been born, so let's now look I Timothy 5 for our second example more from the New Testament.

Here is another case of perpetual singleness redeemed to an advantage. In this text you will see that there was a list of women who were widows. I Timothy 5:3, 9-16 says [3] *Honor widows who are truly widows.*

[9] Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, [10] and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. [11] But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry [12] and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. [13] Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. [14] So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. [15] For some have already strayed after Satan. [16] If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

It seems the early church had a list of women who now by widowhood are in a state of perpetual singleness and were given the honor of support to engage in ministry, very similar to what Anna the Prophetess would have done. While younger widows may end up in that position and may choose to take advantage of their perpetual singleness, they are not to take vows of celibacy (vows of refusing to marry) but they can serve and take advantage of the moment but they should also be ready to marry and be engaged in the life of their family. So the first blessing of perpetual singleness is the advantage for spiritual growth.

A second blessing of perpetual singleness is cultural. So, there is not only spiritual depth that can be pursued in perpetual singleness but there is cultural width. Being married and having kids when I had a night free, I couldn't just go and enjoy a baseball game because I had to spend time with the kids. In perpetual singleness, your development in wisdom in terms of cultural engagement and making these relationships, you now have greater freedom to do that.

A third blessing of perpetual singleness is ministerial breadth. In this state you now have time to be a steward of your time, talent and treasures in ways that you wouldn't be able to do if you were married. That doesn't mean if you're not gifted to remain single that you abandon the desires to be married, but it does mean don't die in a pile of self-pity. Cease the moment for Christ. Cease the moment as a moment for ministerial breadth of cultural depth of spiritual growth to accomplish those things and then invest yourself in that status of life you have now.

The fourth blessing of perpetual singleness is you now have the opportunity to manifest to the world the sufficiency of Christ. Christ is enough, even if you don't have the gift of celibacy. I'd like to look at another passage in I Corinthians 9.

I Corinthians 9:1-8 says [1] *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? [2] If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.*

[3] This is my defense to those who would examine me. [4] Do we not have the right to eat and drink? [5] Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? [6] Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? [7] Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

[8] Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same?

Then Paul goes on to speak about how the Word of God has guided but here is what he is saying in this text. Here is the glorious flip side of Christian liberty. Paul is saying he has a right to eat and drink but he gives that up for the sake of Jewish evangelism. He doesn't want to offend them so he can get an opportunity to talk with them about the Gospel. He says he has a right to have a believing wife, but for this present distress he has chosen not to. He has a right to be supported in the ministry but he and Barnabas had decided to work to support themselves for various reasons. Paul is saying he has all these rights but he also has the liberty to give them up so while he is in a situation and because of the power and need of the Gospel, he can cease this moment not as God's providential infringement on his rights to be married, but of God's granting of an opportunity to embrace a stewardship that he hadn't sought but that He is enough and he can live it for Him and His glory.

I have the power to turn that which I don't have for that which I have a right to have and what I have a right to have I can give up and what I don't have I can turn over to the Lord and live a life free from the embitteredness that comes without the liberating power and presence of the Lord.

There are disadvantages to perpetual singleness which need to be redemptively avoided. Let's look at I Corinthians 7:1-6 which says *[1] Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." [2] But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. [4] For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. [5] Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

[6] Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. [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.

If you have the gift of celibacy then you don't have to seek marriage, because one of the basic blessings of marriage is that it is the place for one to engage shamelessly in sexual relationships in the honor of a marriage bed. If you don't have the gift of celibacy, you can still embrace the moment of singleness and take advantage of it to grow in the Lord spiritually, culturally, and ministerially, but you need to be on guard lest you are tempted.

Men, don't sensually touch a woman. That is what I Corinthians 7:1 is particularly dealing with when it talks of not having sexual relations with a woman. The same thing goes for women with men, don't touch men sensually. Sensual touching, sexual intimacy and all those romantic forms belong within the marriage covenant. Even if you don't have the gift of celibacy and you embrace God's providence in this time of singleness, you have always got to be on guard, because of that God given appetite for intimacy. If you have the gift of celibacy, it means you don't have that appetite. I have been in the ministry a long time and I have had a number of

people come and tell me they have the gift of celibacy and I've actually only seen two in my life that I believe actually had the gift.

What is one of the means of grace? Fellowship is one of the means of grace. What is the closest fellowship you ought to have in this world? It is in your marriage. I like what one guy said 'marriage is like sandpaper for we keep rubbing the edges off, don't we? The closer you are the more the edges show up and the more the rubs are made.' Then we see someone and for me it would be 'I wished I could be like my wife Cindy for how do you that 'soft answer turns away wrath' thing all the time?' So, here are these glorious moments of growth within marriage that a person doesn't have in the most intimate relationship of fellowship. This is why I wished every married person would understand the need for them to get engaged with every person in perpetual singleness in this moment to give them as much fellowship as possible to share in closer relationships than just surface talk. I think this is something every church needs to be thinking of how this can be done with the marrieds and singles in their congregation.

Paul is also not saying in this text that if you get married it will solve all your sexual sin problems, but he is saying that if you're married you are in the environment whereby you can engage in shameless sexuality and we're also in an environment, when married, of deep fellowship. Here are those in perpetual singleness who don't have the gift of celibacy but they are not in the marriage to celebrate and they don't have a closeness of a husband or wife to see what they shouldn't do and see what they want to do as a means of grace. That is why it is so important for us to be engaged with one another – married and single, older and younger, all with propriety. I'm talking about married men taking it upon themselves to have fellowship with unmarried women at the level that would be inappropriate. We can be spiritual fathers and brothers and sisters in the Lord that are engaged with our brothers and sisters who don't have that God given avenue of marriage for intimacy and marriage for fellowship.

Part three is on the way in the theology of singleness for our next study in this series. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the Lord Jesus and the way that He redeems us, works in our lives and the way we can fellowship together. Lord, I pray for my brothers and sisters who are in perpetual singleness and that You would help them not to fall prey to the idolatry of marriage and yet that they don't try and deny the dynamics of life in terms of how we're made to function relationally and in a way that honors You, yet with contentment in Christ embrace the stewardship of the moment. Then may we as pastors, elders, deacons and as communities surround one another to get the benefits of those in this status of life of continued singleness as the moments pass and we get the benefits from them and then we get to benefit them. Help us do this Lord so that others may see that Your family is different – Christ's church – for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.