

God Marriage and Family: Lesson Nine-Singleness

I.) Introduction: 46% single in USA in 2000, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, John the Baptist single in the Bible: Singleness can be a gift from God (Matthew 19:11-12, 1 Corinthians 7:7).

II.) Singleness in the Old Testament: Adolescence was not a biblical term because young people were married shortly after puberty, typically at age 12 or 13 for girls, and age 15 or 16 for boys. Five categories of singles were noted in the Old Testament: A.) Widows: younger widows were encouraged to remarry while older widows were to be cared for by their own families by returning to their father's household or through levirate marriage. Widowhood could also be considered symbolic of God's reproach in reference to his people (Isaiah 4:1, 47:8-9). B.) Eunuchs (Esther 2:3, 14-15) military leaders (2 Kings 25:19, Jeremiah 52:25) viewed as detestable to the Jews (Deuteronomy 23:1, Leviticus 21:20), and is indicative of God's judgment (2 Kings 20:18, Isaiah 39:7). C.) Inability to marry because of disease (leprosy) or poverty D.) The divine call to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 16:1-4 is the only direct call to singleness in the Old Testament E.) Divorce initiated by the husband F.) Young people waiting to get married

III.) Singleness in the New Testament: A.) Is viewed more positively but is definitely not the norm (1 Corinthians 7:9, 1 Timothy 4:1-3). The fact that it can be a gift bestowed by God was a novel idea to New Testament Christians. (Note the symbolism of the 144,000 in Revelation 14.) B.) It is to be freely chosen by a select few and for the church to forbid marriage is demonic (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

IV.) Church History: Gnosticism and Greek philosophy combined with Manichaean theology and the centralization of church power within the Roman Catholic Church eventually led to singleness being mandated for clergy in the first Lateran Council of 1123, hence the saying, "they are married to the church". Monasticism and nunnery became normative in the church and virginity was exalted in the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. He also taught that sexual expression even in marriage had a certain inherent shame which violates the express teaching of Scripture as we saw previous lessons. The Protestant Reformation repudiated the view of holy orders being a sacrament and returned marriage to its proper function within the clergy (see the recent movie Luther).

V.) Issues and Applications for Christian Singles: Our authors condemn premarital sex and cohabitation even for engaged Christian couples. Contra Hollywood, love is by choice, not by chance. A Christian is to be in control of love and not the reverse. Christians should avoid not only the loss of physical virginity but also be concerned about their overall heart virginity which they can offer their prospective spouse. A.) Advice is given to young men in at least eight different areas: 1.) Pray and trust God to deliver you and protect you from temptation (Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4; Matthew 26:36, 40-41 and parallels). Realize that while the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41). They will not be able to resist temptation in their own strength; they must look to God and appropriate his power to strengthen them in their hour of temptation. For God is faithful: (1 Corinthians 10:12-13). 2.) Grow strong in the Lord and the knowledge of his Word (1 John 2:12, 14; cf. Proverbs 20:29). 3.) Cultivate the virtues of self-control (Titus 2:6; cf. 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8) and purity of heart (1 Timothy 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:22). 4.) Seek the company and accountability of other, like-minded male believers. 5.) Understand that the temptation is not the sin, as Jesus illustrates (Hebrews 4:15). 6.) When we do sin, we should realize that God stands ready to forgive (1 John 1:9; 2:1) rather than being immobilized by guilt (Hebrews 4:16). 7.) Do not become paranoid with respect to women and courtship in terms of the avoiding them, rather treat younger women like sisters in all purity (1 Timothy 5:2). 8.) Do not overestimate your ability to resist temptation nor underestimate the power of the temptation and the tempter himself (Genesis 39, Romans 13:12-14). B.) advice to young women is not as copious in the Scripture but includes modesty of appearance (1 Peter 3:1-3; 1 Timothy 2:5-10) and the avoidance of the use of non-verbal cues, suggestive behaviors or

aggressive initiation of relationships with men. This does not indicate that Christian women should not augment their beauty with makeup or perfume or dress in an unstylish way, rather they are to be good stewards of the beauty God has given them, using it for the good of his Kingdom. C.) advice is given concerning the relationship of widows to the church. They must be alone and have no close relatives to help them, have a good Christian testimony and reputation of good deeds in the church, have been faithful to their now deceased husband and be at least 60 years old and past the point where they could legitimately be expected to remarry which is generally viewed as the prudent course of action for younger widows. James 1:17 in conjunction with the admonitions in the pastoral epistles provides a general framework for the diaconate ministry to widows in the New Testament. D.) With respect to divorcees, our authors exhort the Christian community and church leaders to care for them redemptively. Note: divorce will be covered more completely in Chapter 11.

Conclusion: Christian singles are encouraged to remember that the married status is no one's destiny in the eternal sense. Therefore, cultivate contentment as exhorted in 1 Timothy 6:6 and Philippians 4:11. Discontentment can indicate that Jesus is not sufficient and manifests a bad testimony to unbelieving world. In the church we must view these singles as an integral part of Christ's body and welcome them into our families on a regular basis to the enrichment of all concerned. The church is the Christian single's new family in Christ and is the eternal family of God so no Christian single should feel like a "dry tree" (Luke 18:28-30 cf. Isaiah 56:3-5).