

Introduction to Christian Ethics Part 2
Course Developed by Ron Habinski in 2002/2003
for
An Adult Bible Class, at Greenbelt Baptist Church, Ottawa

Unit #2 – Marital and Sexual Issues

Singleness

- The next topic I would like to explore with you in this series of marital and sexual topics is the subject of singleness.
- By this I mean the unmarried state in which all of us live a good part of our lives, and some people live all of their lives.
- In this unit, I would like to explore the subject of singleness and some of its implications.
- Before we get into this sensitive subject, let me try to make clear how I approach this subject.
- Some people confuse ***the fact of singleness throughout most or all of life*** with ***the spiritual gift of singleness***, which Jesus and Paul both spoke about [**Mt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:25-35**].
- I am convinced that the fact of singleness or a life lived alone, and the gift of singleness, are separate and distinct issues, although from the outside they may look much the same.

- I do not intend to get into a detailed exploration of the issue of ***the gift of singleness***, whatever that may be, in this lesson, except for making a few incidental observations to clear the deck for our examination of singleness in general.
- **The first point to note about *the gift of singleness*** is that the Bible teaches nothing about taking vows of celibacy, or promising to God that one will live all of life in a state of devotion to Him that involves remaining unmarried.
- As far as the Scriptures indicate, God has never invited anyone to make such a pledge, and we can confidently assert that there is no mention of such a life-limiting pledge being taken by anyone anywhere in the Bible.
- As a general rule, Jesus discouraged the taking or making of vows about anything at all [**READ Mt 5:33-37**].
- Because of this teaching of Jesus, there is no justification for encouraging anyone to even consider taking a vow to remain single for life.
- Young adults are unlikely to know whether they are capable of living life as single persons without regret and dissatisfaction, and vows unnecessarily and unwisely entered into can cause lifelong hurt and trouble.
- Incidentally, under the Law of Moses, a father was given the authority to free a child from an unwise vow made to God, and similarly, a husband was given the authority to

free his wife from such a vow.

- But Jesus simply discouraged all swearing of oaths or vow taking, and this instruction saves His people from the unnecessary hurt and trouble involved in taking a vow that is well meant but ill advised or that cannot be kept.
- As we will see shortly, the Scriptures encourage all followers of Jesus to see themselves as free to marry.
- **The second point to note about *the gift of singleness*** is that it causes much unnecessary confusion and hurt to suggest that every Christian who ends up living life unmarried is doing so because God has decided and intends that he or she will live life in that condition.
- It is wrong to suggest that they are single because God has decided to give them a gift that they never asked for and do not want.
- Many single people are very unsatisfied and unhappy with their singleness, and it is very unhelpful to them to suggest that it is God's will that they remain single and do not have a life partner.
- I believe that having the spiritual gift of singleness is a very special and exceptional situation that touches the lives of very few believers.
- We have no right to assume that God has given the spiritual gift of singleness to everyone who finds himself living life as an unmarried person.
- There are individuals, and most of us have known some of them, who say they want to live life in a single or unmarried state.
- For some of these, such statements may just be sour grapes.
- But there are others who genuinely seem to mean it, and people who know them can testify that they seem truly content and at peace in their singleness.
- Nevertheless, the Scriptures indicate, ***both positively and negatively***, that marriage is a good thing, and it is best for most people to marry.
- In the account of creation in Genesis (2:18) we read God's own opinion that it was not good for man to be alone, so God takes steps to provide him with a suitable helper.
- And we believe that in what God did, He also had in mind providing Eve with a suitable helper in her husband, because God would not be concerned about Adam's needs without also caring about those of Eve.
- For negative reasons as well, Paul makes the point that it is best for most men and women to marry [**READ 1 Cor 7:1f, 8f**].
- While Paul says that there is something good to be said about remaining single, he goes on to say that on balance, because of the nature of our common human need, it is best for every man and woman to marry.
- Paul is speaking to the situation of real flesh and blood people who have sexual needs that can only be honourable met, from God's perspective, within marriage.
- Of course, Paul was aware of the creation account, and the very positive view of marriage included in it.
- It is interesting to note that most people, both Christians and non-Christians, seem to

agree that marriage is a good and desirable way to live.

- Consequently, most individuals, deep down inside, really want to have a life partner.
- The question that arises, therefore is:

Q: Why do so many people who would like to be married, live life unmarried? What are some of the answers that we might give to this very big question? What do you think?

A: [DISCUSS]

Personal illness or disability,

Physical appearance,

Obvious and serious character flaws of many types,

Personal shyness or fearfulness,

Living in a remote location where suitable prospects are not available,

Unrealistic expectations or requirements that candidates cannot meet,

Being part of a small group that discourages marriage outside the group,

Failing to meet the right person and have the required sort of mutual recognition,

Exposure to toxic role models or sexual abuse that leaves individuals bruised, broken, sexually twisted,

A controlling parent who discourages all relationships.

- I would like to draw your attention to another very common reason for continuing singleness that usually goes unrecognized.

- Many individuals lack the personal initiative, energy, self confidence or time to actively seek out a suitable potential mate and build a loving relationship.

- We might think that for them singleness is at least partly their own doing, but there is another way of looking at their situation.

- For such people, singleness is the direct result of living in a western culture in which marriages are not arranged by parents or a marriage broker of some sort.

- In societies where marriages are arranged by others, the proportion of people who get married tends to be much higher, and the proportion of people who remain single tends to be much lower.

- The Bible mentions arranged marriages, because they were very widespread in Bible times.

- Even now arranged marriages are the norm in much of the world.

- But the Bible never commands or encourages anyone to practice the arranging of marriages for the unmarried, and neither does it discourage or deprecate this practice.

- In fact, this is an area about which we have received no instruction or commands from God, so it is clear that He has left individuals free to find a life partner in whatever way they can.

- However, it seems to be an indisputable fact that most people growing up in our

western culture *would far rather choose their own life partner than trust anyone else to do it for them.*

Q: Do you agree?

- Because most people in our culture insist on finding their own life partners and arranging their own marriages by and for themselves, a lot of individuals who would really like to marry end up living life alone.
- Very few would surrender their personal freedom in the choice of a life partner in our culture, and let someone else make all the arrangements.
- In fact, Western societies are not organized to accommodate individuals who might be willing to let others choose a partner for them.
- On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly common for individuals to seek the help of a matching service, get friends to help them, or use personal advertisements of one sort or another to try to find a suitable partner.
- But individuals asking someone to help them insist on deciding for themselves whether a prospect is suitable, acceptable and attractive to them.
- There are undoubtedly good things about finding and choosing one's own life partner.

Q: What are some of them?

A: [DISCUSS]

- Individuals who get married generally begin their marriages with a strong emotional attachment of love and commitment, and they feel a personal ownership of their new relationship, because they have had a decisive part in choosing it and agreeing to it.

Q: Can you think of anything good about the custom of arranged marriages?

A: More individuals end up with a partner and a chance at marital happiness, including some who seem quite unlikely to find a partner on their own.

- The success rate of marriages in cultures where marriages are arranged seems no poorer than in our culture.
- The families of both bride and groom tend to be supportive of the success of the marriage they have arranged.
- Often this is not true in our culture.
- Another good thing about arranged marriages is this: because the individuals involved in them have little or no say as to who they will marry, they naturally tend to focus on making their marriages work.

- Of course, all married people should do this, but those who choose their own partner often think that when the choosing is well done, the marriage will work well with little special effort by either partner.
- In contrast, people in arranged marriages tend to be determined to succeed rather than over confident of success.

Q: What are some of the disadvantages of a culture in which people have to find and choose their own life partners?

A: [DISCUSS]

- Many individuals end up without a life partner.
 - Back before September 11th, I heard about a study that found that in the United States, a professional woman (doctor, lawyer, nurse, engineer) in her mid thirties had a better chance of being assaulted by a terrorist than of getting married.
 - Sexual attraction and the romantic feelings and impulses that we refer to as love *can be blind*.
 - Consequently, individuals may focus on physical appearance or desirable traits in their prospective partner, *and entirely ignore or neglect to take seriously truly important matters* such as differences in beliefs and values, character defects, areas of obvious conflict that are unlikely to be resolved and clear indications of personal unsuitability and incompatibility.
 - Mistakes made about such serious issues can cause great pain and trouble in a marriage.
 - People who choose their own partner may be over confident about the natural and effortless success of their marriages, and this can set them to give up and bail out when serious problems arise.
 - In our culture, individuals naturally tend to focus very much on the question of *their choice of a suitable partner*.
 - If things get really rocky after they are married, they may tend to think that *the real problem is the person they have chosen, rather than the quality of their joint efforts to make the relationship work*.
 - Thinking that the only real problem is the unwise choice they have made, they may jump to the conclusion that their wrong choice should be “fixed” by getting a divorce, and that they should fix their marital difficulties, not by working at them together, but by quitting and making a better choice next time.
 - Of course, such a light-hearted attitude toward the commitment involved in marriage can also set people up for failure in future marriages, if they continue to think that the all important thing is making the right choice, and the only real reason for trouble is choosing unwisely.
- Some years ago I spoke to a large group of Christian singles aged about 35 and up

about the problems they struggled with as singles.

- I did this because I know that many singles really do not want to be single and I believe that taking stock of challenges and problems is a good starting point for all of us when we find something really difficult.
 - We discussed their challenges and problems at length, and they came up with a long list of issues that some or many of them struggled with.
 - There was hurt, disappointment and frustration evident in a good number of their comments.
 - They are not to be faulted for this, because we have God's own opinion on record that it is not good for a man to be alone, and I don't believe that He sees the situation of a woman living alone any differently.
 - In fact, singleness has become even more objectionable and sad, because God has created the marriage option and so many are enjoying it.
 - We need to have some appreciation of the problem typically faced by singles, because we need to be able to support, encourage and help them as their brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - The Bible says, "*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill Christ's law.*"
- [Gal 6:2]**
- Christ's law, of course, is to love one another; we can't pretend to do that if we do not help each other with our hurts and burdens.

Q: What are some of the challenges or issues that single individuals have to face up to?

A: [DISCUSS]

- One important and difficult area of challenge that singles have to deal with, because of the drives that God has built into our natures in creation, is the need for affection, belonging and sexual intimacy.
- Those who do without in this important area are often subject to painful inner struggles, hurts and temptations.
- It is because of this obvious fact of life that Paul taught that every man should have his own wife and every woman should have her own husband.
- Unfortunately, when Paul gave this direction to the Church, he gave no shortcuts or tips on how to make it happen.
- Knowing that it is all right and even desirable to get a life partner does not make it happen.
- The frustration of unmet personal needs in this very important area is difficult for most people to live with.
- The standard of *sex within marriage only* is a very difficult one for those who find themselves living alone for years and years and not liking it.
- Western culture has rejected and scoffs at the suggestion that sexual intimacy should

only be enjoyed within marriage.

- The Scriptures clearly teach this principle [**READ 1 Cor 6:13b-20**].
 - I think it is a very bad thing that Christians so seldom speak plainly among themselves about the obligation placed upon us by God in the area of sexual purity, and the difficulty we may have in honouring it.
 - Many professing Christians, both young people and adults, do not honour it.
 - This passage tells us that our Lord cares about our bodies and their needs, and wants us to manage them in a way pleasing to Him (vs. 13c).
 - The proof that God cares about our bodies is found in the fact that He intends to raise them from the dead (vs. 14).
 - Another reason for honouring God with our bodies is found in the fact that we are connected to Jesus as parts of His body (vs. 15 - 17).
 - Paul encourages the followers of Jesus to flee from sexual immorality, because it constitutes a sin against our own bodies, because our bodies are temples indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, and because we have been purchased by Jesus and belong to God (vss. 18 - 20).
 - I believe we have a duty to encourage brothers and sisters in Christ who struggle with the challenges of singleness as we who are married have done in the past.
 - I have in mind both the young who have just recently discovered their sexual nature and desires and are struggling with what to make of them, and those who find themselves struggling with the same needs well beyond the time of their youth.
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- As a Christian family, we have a duty to minister to the needs of singles.
 - What and how much each of us can do will depend on the opportunities that come our way, and the kind of relationship we have with a specific individual.

Q: What are some of the things that we can all do to support or encourage Christians who are single and would like to be married?

A: [DISCUSS]

- Develop enduring friendships with them, making them a part of your extended family and including them in festive occasions and social gatherings.
- Include them in group activities.
- Discuss their needs & hurts with them.
- Pray for them,
- Give them constructive feedback on how to manage their situations and how to improve their marital prospects,
- Try to help them meet potential partners,
- Encourage them to practice personal chastity,
- Help them to recognize, develop and exercise their spiritual gifts, because this is personally fulfilling, and can help people struggling with loneliness.