

## The Glory of Singleness

1Corinthians 7.25–28

*Pastoral prayer: Ps 23*

### *Introduction*

Grateful for prayers while away unexpectedly last wk. L slowly recovering, moved to rehab center yesterday, long road ahead. Thankfully no longer life-threatening, though potentially life-altering. On behalf of entire fam, thank you.

1Cor 7 (p. 770). Dift kind of sermon today. Rather than address one txt, focus on one topic: singleness. Almost imposs task to preach a msg on singleness: dift ages, types, experiences of singles. "Bc marr peo were all single once, they tend to think that they know all there is to know about singleness. This is not so" (Margaret Clarkson, *RBMW*, xvii). So why try? Many reasons: # of singles in our ch, of marr peo in our ch now over half will be single some day. Thus touches an area of life that most of our peo now or will exp. But a bigger reason yet: way NT talks about singleness is mind-blowing, revolutionary, truly countercultural. Ex in our txt.

What is mind-blowing, revolutionary, truly countercultural? Paul commends singleness: *it is good*. Dift from Xianity's predecessor Judaism, a sin not to marry: "Marr is a comm in J trad & celibacy is to be deplored" (*New Ency of J*). Dift from other Abrahamic faith Islam: celibacy "exceeds the law of G" (Q 24.32; 30.21). In fact what the Scrs teach about singleness/marr/children deflates any notion that all rels are essentially the same. I know why some of you think that: love, hope, G, whatever—just coexist. Right, peo of dift faiths can/should coexist. But saying that all rels essentially the same similar to saying all Asians look the same: as simplistic as it is uninformed, shows that you haven't looked all that closely.

Not just dift from other rels, but also soc: if not marr, then at least sex makes a pers complete/fulfilled (ill of TV, movies, ent news).

One step further: Paul's teaching contradicts a lot of Xian belief & prac too. Clyde Ervine: since sexual rev of 60's, conservatives have "sprung to the defence [sic] of the 'oneflesh' exclusivity of marr" in a way that makes marr "so normative for Xians as almost oblig," & libs have "sought to accommodate the culture by modifying trad Xian sexual ethics in the dir of pers sexual freedom." Concludes: "in both cases, whether in its lib or conserv wings, has not the ch swallowed the culturally entrenched notion that sexual expression is so central to our self-definition & so nec for pers wholeness that singles who are celibate must either have something wrong w them or stand in need of sexual liberation?" (225). Stinging criticism, leads us to reconsider Paul, indeed all Scr.

Q: how can Paul say singleness is good if G said it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2.18) & all OT elevates marr & fam?

## Observations

1. Command to "be fruitful and multiply" was to Adam & Eve specifically and to humanity generally, not to every human spec. Jewish interp: a sin not to marry & have children (Gen 1.28, p. 1). But OT examples of faithful peo w no children &/or no spouse: Jer, Neh, Dan. Gen not spec. Comm given spec to three sets of peo: Adam & Eve, Noah, Jacob. All represent begs: entire race, renewed race, chosen race. Not sinning not to marry/have children.

2. Promise of children & land given as evidences of blessing under old cov (Deut 28.4, p. 142). Sinaitic/Mosaic cov (OT) conditional: blessings if peo obeyed, curses if disobeyed. Children & land given as application of promise to Abr: offspring numbering like stars of heaven, land given to his descendants. Explains many OT psgs: laws (land transfer/Z's daughters, levirate marr), fulfillment motif in Joshua (not one promise failed), fruitful wives & vineyards. Marr/ch & land signs of blessing under old cov. But peo disobeid, incurred curse of Deut 28.18ff. Fulfilled in prophets (Amos 8.13; Isa 48.18–19). Thus north defeated by Assyria, south by Babylon.

Yet not a complete annihilation. Jewish peo survived. Why? Though old cov was conditional, Abr cov was not. G had promised to bless the whole world through Abr's offspring. Throughout OT thought it would be through many offspring. Turns out to be through One.

3. In J G fulfilled his promise to Abr (Gal 3.16, p. 784). Expected G would bless world through many offspring, but ult through One: X. Amazingly Promised Offspring cursed for his disobeid peo (13–14) to bring promise to all who believe, Jew or non-Jew (29). Thus all who believe J are A's offspring. No longer are his peo under failed cov of Sinai, but not brought into new cov relat w G through J.

Good news for all, Jew or non-Jew: our sense that we have done bad things/wrong/damnable is in fact right. We haven't lived up to our own standards, much less G's. & we are under a curse. Good news: J was cursed for us so that we might be blessed. Comes by *faith*: reliance not on expunging your record of wrong, but by coming to J w your record of wrong & trusting him to expunge it.

4. Central blessing of this new cov not children & land but union w X (Eph 1.3). Secures every other spir blessing heaven has to offer. No longer about children & land but adoption, redemption, forgiveness, security, Sp, new fam. Union w X defines the peo of G.

## Implications

1. Marr/children & land not the new cov blessings, not ID. Yes, still blessings from G (Jms 1.17), like deep friendships & good health & summer/winter/springtime/harvest. But not the promise of new cov, union w X is. Marr not indicator of G's approval, cross & empty tomb are. So ID not found in mar status but in union w X. Ervine: NT strangely silent wrt genealogies, compared to OT. "Not only do the gen lists disappear; they are, I suggest, replaced by txts like Rom 16, where Paul provides a list of women & men, the free & the slaves, the marr & the single, who constitute his new fam of bros & sis in X" (221). ID found in union w X, & w X's peo.

2. Still not good to be alone, but now new provision: the ch. Barry Danylak: "Although Paul may have had some extended time of solitude imm after his conv, he like J was a man immersed in new fam relats." Details places Paul refers to bro, sis, children, legit sons, kinsmen, as son w a father, etc. Careful to note: "not to suggest that the relats that come through the new fam of G are a sub for a spouse... But intimacy has other dimensions, beyond the phys. A bond of spir unity as bros & sis in X can emerge through a oneness of mind in corp prayer & worship, a shared eternal hope, & a common mission of proclaiming the gos & making discs" (202–3). Ill of R Dzina's email: "your fam is our fam."

3. Marr is for time, not eternity. Ill of divorce lawyer ad: "when diamonds aren't forever," i.e., call us. Diamonds aren't forever, & neither are marrs (Mt 22.29–30, p. 666). Can be confusing for those in good marrs: why wouldn't G want this to continue forever? But a word of his grace to those in bad marrs, never married but wanted to: as wonderful as a blessing as marr can be, not forever, eternal. Piper: "a parable of permanence," not the perm thing itself. Must never make marr less than G intends it to be, nor more.

4. Lifelong singles typify fut kingdom. This age vs. coming age (Lk 20.34–36, p. 709). Goes back to theme of Eph: arrival of fut in X. New age has dawned, new world hasn't. Not in new world yet, so free to marry & have children. But new age has dawned, so free not to marry & have children. No longer tied backwards to old cov, instead singleness points forwards to the age when everyone will be unmarried & free to serve the K forever. Saw it in OT w Jer, Neh, Dan, & we see it today. "But not my choice." So J said (Mt 19.12). For whatever reason you are single, the K has good purposes.

## **Application**

1. Beware idolizing marr in our own hearts. Not a sin to marry/want to marry/seek a spouse, but marital status not your id. If

single, marr won't fix your issues, might exacerbate! X is all we need, so we all need to hold to marriage loosely.

2. Beware idolizing marr for others. Not nec wrong to try to set someone up, pray that single friends marry, esp. if we know they want to marry. But we betray our idolatry of marr when we say, "don't know why he hasn't married, she should be married." Our thinking: they're 1st class peo consigned to a 2nd class fate, should be 1st class, i.e., married. Micah McCormick: "Granted that marr can certainly be a blessing from G & a means to joyful sanc—is it the only means? Then why do we sometimes pray like it is? G blesses his peo & sanctifies his peo through an array of means, inc Scr, preaching, the Lord's Supper, & the intimate fellowship of believers gathered tog in a ch fam. Why would we pray for someone to love a fut spouse & forget to pray that they would love the peo in their own ch that they have covenanted to love?"

3. Beware idolizing marr in ch. Thus no req to marry in order to be elder/deacon, only req to be sexually pure. Thus resist urge to subdivide: one comm, not many. Can be helpful at times, but must be careful not to highlight diffs. Esp imp for marr: bc of cultural norms in & out of ch, marr hold the cards/have the power. Lay them down, invite unmarried into your life. Don't assume singles all want to hang out w each other bc they are single. Do you hang out w every marr couple bc they're married too? Of course not! Esp think of single moms in our comm: need to give serious thought to how our comm can come under & serve them. What holds us in common is not marital status but J—and we all share him.