

Derek Radney
College Director
Calvary Baptist Church
August 10th, 2008

Dating, Marriage, and Singleness:
A Look at Ephesians 5:22-33 and I Corinthians 7

- I. Introduction: Because we are sinful by nature, we tend to pervert good things that God gives us. When it comes to love and marriage or dating and singleness, the consequences are great. I want to start out by pointing out a few incorrect approaches and ideas of dating.
 - A. God has one person out there that it is my job to find.
 - B. Finding a boyfriend or girlfriend will make my life whole.
 - C. I am young and not ready to get married, so I am going to have fun dating and not getting too serious.
 - D. If I am single, that means there is something wrong with me.
 - E. The most important thing in finding a spouse is having a connection with someone.
 - F. If someone loves me, they embrace my flaws and never point them out to me.
 - G. I need to make a list of things I am looking for in a spouse.
 - H. You know you are in love when you have the tingly feelings.

- II. **Proposition:** Christians must understand the institution of marriage and the gift of singleness in order to be empowered by the gospel in relationships.

- III. **Organizational Sentence:** Today we will look the roles in a marriage, the institution of marriage, the gift of singleness, what this means for dating, and how the gospel empowers us to love one another.

- IV. God has designed marriage to have specific roles for husbands and wives. (Eph. 5.22-31)
 - A. Wives be subject to your husbands. (v.22-24)

Ephesians 5:22 ²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

 1. What is submission? Answer: *as to the Lord*
 - a. This does not mean you don't make decisions.
 - b. this does not mean you don't give input.
 - c. this does not mean you don't correct (in certain contexts).
 - d. this does not mean you don't ask questions.
 - e. There is a place for all of these things, but they are to be done with respect and honor, understanding that the husband is the head of the wife and family.
 - f. The husband has the responsibility and authority to lead the family to fear the Lord.
 - g. He is to be respected and deferred to.
 2. Christ is the head of the Church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.
 - a. What does 'head' mean?
 - i. Secondary meaning: Source
 - ii. Primary meaning: Ruler and authority over
 - b. Why the phrase 'He Himself being the Savior of the body'?

- i. Paul is merely showing what kind of Head Jesus is over His body, which he will soon use to exhort husbands.
- ii. The 'But' that begins verse 24 shows that husbands are not likened to Christ as Savior but to Christ as Head.
- c. Wives are to submit 'in everything' (v.24).
 - i. This means there is no sphere of life that a wife can claim independence and freedom from the headship of her husband.
 - ii. This does not mean that she is to obey anything He tells her to do.
 - iii. **Appl:** Women, I encourage you to be very careful who you date. It is easy to fall for a guy and to develop an emotional bond for someone and marry someone who you cannot easily respect, follow, and obey once you are married. When you are dating, the guy is not your head, and so life can be bliss. But, once you are married, you are called by God to take up this role. Think very hard about who you let your heart love.
 - iv. **Appl:** Men, watch how the ladies submit to God and to her father and other people in authority over her, and you will get a good picture of how they will submit to you. A woman's looks will fade, but a woman who fears God will bring a husband joy and peace for many years.

B. Husbands love your wives. (5.25-29)

Ephesians 5:25-30 ⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.

1. Love requires sacrificial acts (v.25)
2. Love concerns itself with the spiritual growth and holiness of the wife (v.26)
3. Love for a wife requires the intensity we have for loving ourselves (v.28-29)
4. **Appl:** Men, do you spend as much time developing this sort of character as you do in the gym or playing video games?
 - a. God requires that husbands love their wives by putting their wives first. Do you have a hard time getting a long with others because you always want things your way?
 - b. God requires that you concern yourself with the spiritual growth of your wife. Do you even know how to lead someone else in a growing relationship with God?

V. Marriage was designed to picture the union of Christ and his church. (5.29-33)

Ephesians 5:29-33 ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

- A. In the same way that the Church becomes the members of Christ's body, the woman and man are joined together with the man as the head of the body. (v.29-30)
 1. Marriage is a picture of Christ and His church. This mystery of two becoming one is great. This mystery of a sinful people becoming one with Christ, being made holy and blameless is a great mystery.

2. This is why homosexual marriage makes no sense. From the beginning, God designed husbands and wives to symbolize Christ and his church. Two men or two women being joined together fails to draw the picture God intended for marriage and thus does not fit God's design.
- B. When two are married, they are to leave the authority of their families and become an independently governed body. (v.31)
- C. The implications of this mystery of marriage and Christ and his church are that husbands should love their wives and wives should respect their husbands. (v.31)

VI. Singleness is a gift from God that allows a person to spend more time focused on kingdom priorities. (I Cor. 7.1-40)

A. Sex is a great gift that is only to be experienced within the confines of marriage. (7.1-7)

1 Corinthians 7:1 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.

1. It is clear that Paul writes this section of his letter as a response to some questions the church had. Apparently, some in the church were arguing that the new converts in their midst should divorce their unbelieving spouses and that sex should cease within these marriages or even all marriages.
2. Paul's general response to these ideas takes two general commands:
 - a. Stay as you are when you have been converted.
 - b. Don't abstain from sex within marriage, but each should reciprocate.
3. The phrase, "It is good for a man not to touch (meaning have sex with) a woman," was an idea that the Corinthians had that Paul is responding to.
4. Paul's response is that in marriage, sexual relations is a reciprocal giving of oneself that should not be withheld. No one should deprive one another of sex.
 - a. This does not mean no one should ever decline sex in marriage.
 - b. It means that a person should not have the rule of no sex in marriage. Sometimes one of you won't be in the mood.
 - c. However, be careful not to 'not be in the mood' too often. This is often the sign of selfishness or relationship problems.
5. Paul says that it is good to refrain from sex for a time for prayer, as sort of a mutual fast.
6. But, he warns that abstaining should not go on long since Satan might use this as a temptation for sexual immorality. This reason gets to the heart of the place of sex. Sex is created by God to be enjoyed within marriage. One of the purposes of marriage is to enjoy this component of our being.
7. In verse 6, Paul explains that he is making a concession. There is debate about what this means, and how you understand this in large part determines how you understand the whole of chapter 7.
 - a. Some argue that when Paul says, "⁶ Now as a concession, not a command" he is referring to marriage. This implies that singleness is the ideal we should all aspire

to but marriage is something that might be necessary for us weak folk who need an outlet for sex. The argument is made from verse 7 where Paul seems to say that he wishes everyone was single like himself. This is not correct.

- b. Rather, when Paul says, “⁶ Now as a concession, not a command” he is referring to the time of abstinence from sex for prayer. His point is that sex should be enjoyed in marriage and couples should not abstain from sex. His only concession to this general principle is that couples can abstain together for prayer, but not for too long! This view then sees Paul’s statement that he wishes all were as himself as a statement concerning his personal freedom from sexual desire which enables him to handle his gift of singleness. He wishes that everyone had freedom from sexual desire so that Satan would not tempt anyone with sexual immorality.
8. This passage implicitly argues that sex should only be practiced within marriage. If this were not true, then this whole argument by Paul would make no sense.

B. Singleness and marriage are both gifts from God. (7.7-9)

1 Corinthians 7:7-9 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. ⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. ⁹ But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

1. With the previous 6 verses, we see that Paul affirms both marriage and singleness as gifts from God. The celibate and single are not the spiritual ones as the Roman Catholic Church has implied. Marriage and Singleness are both gifts from God.
2. How do you know which gift you have? If you are single, then you currently have the gift of singleness. If you find a good spouse and you desire them and you get married, you don’t have the gift. If you are married, you have marriage as a gift.
3. The bible clearly teaches that we all are made to have intimate relationships, but it is also clear that we do not all need sexual relationships. Our culture tells us that we are not healthy if we aren’t having orgasms frequently. This is a lie. We are made for intimacy, not sex. Sex is one avenue for intimacy, but not the only one.
4. Paul clearly sees marriage as a gift and singleness as a gift.
5. **Appl:** Beware of bitterness when single. It is a gift to be used not a state to be mourned.

C. Married converts should not divorce their spouse unless the spouse wants out due to the change in you as a convert, but should remain as they are. (7.10-24)

1 Corinthians 7:10-24 ¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. ¹⁶ Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife? ¹⁷ Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. ¹⁹ For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. ²⁰ Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. ²¹ Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the

opportunity. ²² For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

1. Paul then begins to explain that people should stay as they are when they are converted.
2. When Paul says, “¹⁰ To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord)” and “¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord)” he does not mean that some of what he is saying is from the God and the rest he is making up. He means, Jesus while on earth literally commanded that people should not leave or divorce their spouses. The Lord said this in his earthly ministry. Some of the other things Paul commands are not things Jesus spoke while on earth, but, they still carry divine authority as an apostle (see I Cor.14.37 where Paul says that what he writes are the same as the commands of the Lord).
3. Paul essentially says don't get divorced, even if you are married to a non-believer. (v.10-11)
4. He then gives the reasons why. (v.12-16)
 - a. Paul says that the believing spouse makes the unbelieving spouse and children holy.
 - b. This does not mean that unbelieving family automatically is saved through their faith or will get saved for sure.
 - c. Paul is using holy to mean, 'set apart.' If you are married to an unbeliever, then they are set apart from the world to live in a home where the gospel is lived out and spoken to the family. It is the best evangelistic opportunity you could ask for.
 - d. However, Paul knows that this could also cause marriage problems since the unbelieving spouse might despise Christ and you for trusting in him. In that case, God is a God of peace, and so the believer must let the unbeliever divorce them (v.15). Besides, just because they are in a good position to understand and believe the gospel does not mean that they will be saved (v.16).
5. Paul then makes the general point that becoming a believer should not overturn your whole life. You should remain as you were whether that be as a Jew, slave, or married person (v.17-24). Remain in the condition you were called.

D. Marriage is temporary, and so it should not consume us! (7.25-35)

1 Corinthians 7:25-35 ²⁵ Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, 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, and I would spare you that. 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. 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.

1. Paul continues this line of reasoning by making an important point about the time we live in and marriage. He is responding to questions the Corinthians had about people

- who were engaged and were being pressured not to marry since sex was seen as a bad thing.
2. He makes the point that we live in the time when Christ's kingdom has been established and will be consummated soon. Christ's coming is soon. Therefore, we are in distress and under persecution until then. This present world is passing away and the new heavens and new earth is coming. The point is, marriage is not eternal and in light of the distress that all Christians should expect until Christ returns, marriage adds concerns that aren't necessarily needed.
 3. So, it is good to remain as you are but it is ok as well to marry.
 4. Paul summarizes what he means here in verses 29-35. He makes two points:
 - a. Verse 29-31 - His point is that marriage is not of ultimate importance. It is a gift, as he has said before. But, as he will say below, it can interfere with discipleship (v.33). He lists things that can get in the way of understanding the fact that this world is passing away: marriage, joys of this life, and possessions. None of these is bad in and of themselves, but they can get in the way of living first for Christ's kingdom.
 - b. Verse 32-35 – Paul then makes a point about this issue with regard to anxiety. Generally speaking, if you are married, you often have to worry about things that limit radical discipleship. Providing for the family and protecting and raising godly children can get in the way of engaging the world in evangelism. It is not bad since you have been given the responsibility to raise godly children and a wife, but it limits you. Single people can be more radically devoted to difficult aspects of discipleship. This passage seems to indicate to me that single people are probably better suited to do missions since they are not dragging their family into its suffering.
 5. The general point Paul is making is that marriage is not the ultimate thing, Christ is. Therefore, don't be so consumed by it that you neglect your Christian responsibilities.
 6. **Appl:** This is an important point for single people. It is important that you seek first Christ and his kingdom. Live devoted to these things and then allow God to provide a spouse. If you are consumed about thinking about a girlfriend or boyfriend, then you will most likely not develop a healthy relationship and you will be neglecting your gift of singleness. I found that I was ready to date rightly when I was most content with Christ alone.

E. Summary of marriage and singleness: Marriage and singleness are both gifts from God to be enjoyed, but sharing different priorities. (7.36-40)

1 Corinthians 7:36-40 ³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry- it is no sin. ³⁷ But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. ³⁸ So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. ³⁹ A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

1. Paul then summarizes that getting married is fine and so is staying single. Both are good Christian options and neither implies some deficiency on the part of a person. If you get married, stay married if it is up to you. If you don't get married, you won't have to deal with a lot of stuff and can be more focused on God.

VII. Applications for Dating:

- A. Singleness is a gift from God, so let your first priority be kingdom living.
- B. Marriage is temporary, so do not hold marriage up to ultimate importance because Christ is enough.
- C. Dating should be an investigation of determining whether you can join this person in marriage in your proper role.
- D. Dating should prepare the two of you to be married.
 - 1. This means you shouldn't date unless you are ready to move toward marriage.
 - 2. This means that what you do while dating should help both of you grow in maturity personally and as a couple so that you will be ready for marriage.
 - 3. This means the relationship should develop proportionally.
 - a. emotions
 - b. spiritual life
 - c. physical
 - d. commitment
 - e. time
 - 4. This means men should lead in the dating relationship proportionally to where you are. Generally speaking, men need to step up and take the risk upon themselves. It is not wrong for women to ask men out on dates, but if this becomes the pattern of the relationship, it will be unhealthy.
- E. Dating should involve the community for many reasons.
 - 1. sexual purity
 - 2. 'love' is blind (really it's the tingly feelings that are blind)
 - 3. Older Christians, like parents and church leaders and mentors, have wisdom you do not and so they are in a good position to help form good relationships.
- F. Dating will look different for everyone because everyone has different circumstances.
- G. If you want to date someone, seek to know Christ more, pursuing kingdom priorities, and then look around to see who is doing the same.
 - 1. Guys: Quit looking around for the hottest girl. Quit longing to be in relationship with girls you know nothing about but look attractive. Instead, be faithful in church and evangelism and serving others, and make the effort to get to know girls as friends. Respect them and seek their edification. Then you will find girls that are truly the ones you want to date.
 - a. **ASK GIRLS OUT.** A date doesn't imply you love someone or that you are committing to them. A date is just alone time to get to know someone. Best case scenario: you get to know a girl in a group as friends and you take her out to learn things about her you wouldn't learn in a group setting.
 - b. **BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR INTENTIONS.** Don't leave the girl guessing. After a few times of hanging out one on one, you should tell them what you are thinking and feeling. Don't put them in the situation to start this conversation.
 - c. **DON'T DATE GIRLS WHO ARE REALLY AFFECTIONATE WITH EVERY GUY.** This indicates that a girl is finding her identity in being desired.
 - 2. Girls: Be patient and don't get bitter. Guys are not going to ask you out if you are always complaining about how no guys ask you out. Seek to be faithful in church, in evangelism, and serving others and hopefully good guys will notice. Don't spend

time with guys who don't make their intentions clear. Too much time one on one with a guy will lead to emotions that go beyond the commitment level.

- a. **SAY YES WHEN GUYS ASK YOU OUT.** I do not mean always go out with a guy, but I do mean, unless you know they are not good for you, go out with them and give them a chance. Most likely, it took a lot of courage to ask you out. Get to know them. This is not a commitment to anything but coffee or dinner.
- b. **BE HONEST.** If you know that you don't want to keep spending time with a guy, do not be scared to hurt his feelings. Being a little hurt is better than being angry because you think you were misled.
- c. **DON'T DATE GUYS WHO ARE FULL OF THEMSELVES AND WHO SEEM TO BE CLOSE TO EVERY GIRL.** This indicates that a person is finding fulfillment in intimacy without the maturity to make commitments.

VIII. Living in light of the gospel is the only hope of having a successful godly relationship or of having a successful attitude and approach to singleness.

- A. Christ is enough, so relationships should not develop co-dependently.
- B. Because we have been forgiven and we have Christ, we can forgive.
- C. Because God is faithful, we can trust him to bring change in the other in stead of trying to control and manipulate to bring change.
 1. Shaming and condemning by bringing up past sins and/or using offenses to make a person feel worthless or generalizing
 2. Walking away from conflict
 3. Outbursts of anger in physical or verbal abuse
 4. Crying excessively
- D. Trusting in the gospel means that we find our identity in Christ and not in our spouse. It means finding our joy in Christ and not our spouse. Our spouse cannot fulfill us. If we seek our ultimate joy in them, we will never be happy and will result to trying to control the other person to get them to be like what we think will make us happy.
- E. The gospel is the model of a relationship. We accept one another by grace not because we earn it.
- F. Therefore, the most important quality in a person you want to date must be that they are trusting in the gospel, finding their identity in Christ.
- G. Single people must remember that in light of the fact that marriage is passing away and Christ's kingdom is coming they need to use their freedom for gospel purposes. Single people are freer to travel, stay up late, host people in their homes, etc. There are many advantages to being single when it comes to ministry, and so you need to employ these advantages.
- H. Remember that being single does not mean something is wrong with you. Singleness and marriage are both gifts. To be sure, some people are single because they have social and emotional problems. However, some people are married for these same reasons, but they just happen to find someone who has problems that compliment these problems well (co-dependant relationships).
- I. For those of you who are married, remember that singleness can be lonely and so we should seek to be friends with and open our home to single people who are often kept at the fringe.