

The Dignity of the Single Christian

Introduction.

This is a very important topic, not only for those of us who are currently single, but for everyone. In the first place, those of you who are married now may find yourself single some day, and in the second place I have some things to say to you who are married about the way you relate to those who are single.

Since this is such a personal topic, I feel it is important to let you know more about where I am coming from on several issues. Here are my disclaimers:

1. I believe that all things being equal, it is an advantage to be married. I don't mean that singles are inferior or incomplete, but I believe an honest appraisal of what the Bible says emphatically demonstrates that it is an advantage to be married. Gen. 2:18; Prov. 18:22; Ecc. 9:9.
2. I believe Paul's thoughts about the single life in 1 Corinthians 7 must be understood in the context of the "present distress." 7:6-8; 7:26-28.
3. I do not believe God has a specific will for being single or married.
 - a. God has revealed truth and principles, and granted us common sense.
 - b. But I don't believe He has determined that some be married and some not, or one special person to be married. (one in a million in China a thousand just like you).

With these disclaimers in mind, let's get to work.

Discussion.

I. The Timeliness of the Topic

A. I am so appreciative of your inclusion of this topic in the program, because greater and greater numbers of Christians are single.

1. Compare the 1900 Census, in which...
 - a. 95% adults were married
 - b. 3% never married
 - c. 1% divorced
 - d. 1% widowed

2. With the 2000 Census

- a. 55% married
- b. 6% widowed
- c. 9% divorced
- d. 2% separated
- e. 28% never married

B. Since our churches reflect our communities, this means that nearly one half of the members of the church are or will be unmarried.

- 1. Example: at Elgin, we have 76 people who regularly attend who are 18 and up; 28 are unmarried.
- 2. Classes for families, for married couples, but how much teaching is done for the growing proportion who are unmarried?

C. However, this would not always have been a timely topic.

- 1. We live in a very pro-marriage culture, especially Christians.
- 2. But in the early centuries of church history, there was a strong bias against marriage for a variety of philosophical reasons. Illus. With quotes from Jerome.
- 3. They would have had a special lesson on the "dignity of the married Christian."

II. The Basis of All Dignity

A. The great flaw of our society's definition of dignity and esteem is that it is based on external qualities or achievements.

- 1. "Status symbols" like cars and houses that can be lost so easily.
- 2. Human achievement which is so transitory and easily forgotten.

B. The real basis of dignity and esteem for all human beings is that we are made in God's image and redeemed by His Son.

- 1. Our value is in the fact that we bear the image of God – Matt. 6:26; 10:29-31.
- 2. And if there is any doubt that we have worth in God's eyes, it should be eliminated forever by knowing that while we at our worst He loved us enough to send His Son – Rom. 5:6-8.

3. And so our dignity comes from God, not from ourselves.
- C. As it applies to our subject tonight, your dignity is not determined by your marital status.
1. I know that sometimes married people say things that virtually imply that we are second class Christians and humans-
 - a. "When are you going to get married?" "Why haven't you gotten married?" "You need to get married!"
 - b. Often I hear this from people who aren't exactly in wedded bliss, almost think the reason they want me to get married so much is because they want someone else to be miserable!
 2. This was definitely the belief of many Jews. "Any man who has no wife is no proper man." "As soon as one attains twenty and has not married, He exclaims, 'Blasted be his bones.'"
 3. In our own culture, this view of singleness as a defect is common.
 - a. Dean Martin: "You're Nobody 'Til Somebody Loves You."
 - b. George Strait: "If You Ain't Loving, you Ain't Living."
 4. But would any Christian seriously argue that Ahab and Jezebel or Ananias and Sapphira were superior to Paul?
 5. Let me caution those of you who are married to carefully consider what you say to singles. Particularly, to guard against pressuring people to marry.
 - a. One of the primary predictors of marital success is the older the couple the better. By constantly pushing marriage to those who are barely out of college, you are potentially setting them up for a very difficult life.
 - b. Many Christians are single because there are not many Christians in their area to date, and have strong convictions about not dating or marrying non-Christians. You shouldn't be chastising them; you should be encouraging their conviction.
 - c. I think in most cases most people are single because they haven't found anyone who is appealing to them who feels the same way.
 6. Our dignity comes from our standing with God, period!

III. Threats to the Dignity of the Single Person

A. I have to be honest, I think whatever damage to our dignity we singles experience, it has much more to do with what we tell ourselves than what others say to us.

1. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking "something must be wrong with me" because I am not in a relationship with someone.
2. And believe me, as an extrovert by nature, I can easily fall into the trap of self-pity those times I feel lonely, especially when sick, or on the weekends.
3. It is also easy to be resentful of others who are married, to covet my neighbor's wife or girlfriend, to see some guy act like a jerk to his wife and wonder how someone like that could be married!

B. And so I want to urge those of you who are single to really pay attention to what you tell yourself, and develop a more constructive perspective on what it means to be single.

1. You can bemoan *loneliness* or you can enjoy the *solitude* to grow deeper in the Lord through study and prayer – 1 Cor. 7:35.
2. You can fret over *isolation* or you can revel in *freedom* you have to serve the Lord unencumbered by family duties – 1 Cor. 7:32-33.
3. You can resent the *deprivation* you feel in celibacy or you can develop greater levels of holiness, what the Bible calls *sanctification* – 1 Thess. 4:3-5.

C. The greatest temptation of all single people is selfishness.

1. To be sure, lust and fornication are displays of selfishness.
2. Some single people try to buy happiness by using the money they have that doesn't go to a family to buy the latest toy for grownups, pamper themselves, and become consumed with materialism.
3. But in the broader sense, constantly wallowing in the muck of self-pity is also a kind of selfishness, inordinate concern with self.
4. All of these manifestations of selfishness can lead us from God, and sever us from our true dignity in Him.

Conclusion.

I think the key for those of us who are single is found in Paul's statement in Phil. 4:11-13, to learn to be content. And with that teaching in mind, I want to leave you with three thoughts-

1. *Teach yourself to enjoy life as a single person.* Illus. with having to learn it is okay to go to a movie myself, or eat, etc. If you can't enjoy your own company, why do you think anyone else will?
2. *Focus on what you can control, not on what you can't.* Romance is so delicate, so much of it is timing. And you can't control what someone else thinks. But you can take personal inventory and see areas you need to improve. My prayer is for God to help me be the man I need to be to some day be a husband and father.
3. Use this time to serve God in ways you can't when you get married. The example of Anna – Luke 2:36-38.