

## **SLIDE 1. ANCHORED: A Study of What We Believe and Why**

Teaching: **Article 11: Marriage, Singleness, and Family**

*Sunday March 3, 2023*

When I was a young man – in my twenties - I thought I could do anything. I thought I could do whatever I wanted to do and become whoever I wanted to be.

I had energy and health. I had confidence. I had youthful optimism.

I just didn't have any cash.

I had spent it on education... and beer... and *dating*.

The fact is – I never imagined that I wouldn't get married.

Though even that thought had its own emotional schizophrenia: there were times when I thought that I could do more if I was single – accomplish more because I could focus my energy and confidence and optimism – and time – towards my goals - and only then need to take care of myself – not need to care for someone else as well.

But that was a lonely thought.

More often than not – I thought about what kind of man I was becoming - to attract the kind of woman I hoped to marry.

I didn't want to do life without a life partner – without a wife.

And yet I dreamed about the flexibility of going it on my own.

APPETIZER

### **SLIDE 2. Why do people get married?**

MAIN COURSE

I noticed that none of you said – “because it is a command of the Scriptures.”  
And that's good – because it isn't.

### **SLIDE 3. Marriage isn't a command. Marriage is a choice.**

And until we make that choice – if we make it at all – we are single.

The creation story talks about the human need for intimacy – and implies that the common pattern for finding it is within the marriage covenant.

The OT – as a whole – also seems to suggest that singleness is less desirable than being married – for cultural AND relational reasons.

And yet – there are examples of *single* men and women who made unique contributions within the kingdom of God – and examples of others whose contributions were disrupted by their marriages – which seem to offer a root to a theology of singleness.

For instance - God commands Jeremiah to NOT get married – as an example and sign to a subjugated Israel (Jer. 16:1-4).

The marriages of Ezekiel and Hosea faced interruptions related to their missions.

And though the story of Ruth ends in marriage – it begins with her as a single person who demonstrates covenant loyalty to Naomi – by going with Naomi – to join her people – to worship her God. Ruth shows Naomi an inseparable love – a love worthy of imitation by those who would get married and who are married.

In the NT – both Jesus and Paul minister as single persons.

In fact – Paul encourages the church at Corinth to consider singleness as an opportune gift from God (1 Cor. 7:1-9, 25-35). Hmm.

Quoting him – Paul says, “I wish that all of you were as I am (single) ...but those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this...”

Wouldn't that be a great wedding day text! :)

Paul goes on to explain why the Corinthians – why we – should consider a single life...

**SLIDE 4. ...time is short... I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided.**

**SLIDE 5. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world – how she can please her husband? (1 Cor. 7:1-9, 25-35).**

But this is a lonely thought.

Most of the single people I know feel lonely, don't feel “called” to a single life, and want to be married. So that Paul's invitation to consider the single life feels like a religious rationale to them and sounds like a pitying platitude to their ears.

Perhaps we could say this... If you are single or widowed – may you take the time you've been given – when your interests are less divided - to concern yourself with how you can please the Lord.

May you participate in the community life of our church – connecting with others on Sunday mornings, building friendships in small groups, praying with each other, sharing meals, using your gifts and time - how and when you would in service of the church – working alongside others.

And – may you lean on family. May you care for them and let them care for you!

Because marriage isn't the only form of relational intimacy talked about in the bible – even if it gets a little more mileage.

In the OT...

The bible says that God created humankind in His own image – “male and female He made them” (Gen. 1:27).

He created them to be sexual beings – who were given a mandate to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth...” (Gen. 1:28).

“It was not good for the man (Adam) to be alone,” says the bible. God saw that he needed a partner (Gen. 2:18).

So that “a man would leave his father and his mother and cling to his wife, to become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). That we would – to borrow the old expression – “leave and cleave.”

All of which seems to suggest several principles...

That God created people as male and female – who – together - represent the image of God and His glory.

That God created sex – for intimacy and reproduction. That sex is God's idea. That it is a good thing!

That man and woman were created to be companions.

That a man would leave his family (and a woman hers) to create their own.

That marriage is a unique form of human intimacy – which provides the context for sex and procreation and family.

That husband-and-wife cling to each other as a single flesh – metaphorical and physical.

That marriage is a one-to-one commitment.

That marriage is a heterosexual union.

This is what we see in Genesis 1 and 2: God's first words to us on sexuality and marriage: that God made man and woman to give themselves to each other in marriage – if they so choose.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon celebrate the joy of marriage.

Proverbs describes a happy marriage as a gift from God (12:4; 18:22; 19:14).

Ecclesiastes invites us to enjoy our marital lives (Ecc. 9:9) – though with its characteristic realistic perspective: *Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun.*

And – of course – the Song of Solomon celebrates the sensual delight of sexual intimacy within marriage.

In the NT...

When Jesus teaches about marriage – He affirms God's first words to us about marriage.

**SLIDE 6. *But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.***" (Mk. 10:6-9).

Jesus reinforces the male and femaleness of marriage, the resulting unique unity of marriage, and the commitment of covenant marriage.

Paul supports this understanding of marriage as husband-and-wife.

Quoting him – Paul says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (Col. 3:18-19).

**SLIDE 7. And again, *Wives, submit to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.***

**SLIDE 8. *Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...*** (Eph. 5:22-25).

Lots to unpack here...

First – Paul addresses wives as independent moral agents – no big deal to us – but a huge deal at the time of Christ when women were viewed as subclass citizens and treated as such.

Second – The context for "submission" is mutual. If we go back in the Ephesians text – to v. 15 – we see that this passage is about how to live wisely with God – and it includes 5 instructions: 1. Understand God's will. 2. Be filled with the Spirit of God. 3. Speak songs and hymns and psalms to each other. 4. Give thanks to God. And 5. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21).

Third – And an example of this submission is – wives to their husbands.

Fourth – About this word "submit" – it is not a wrestling term. As if it is some kind of permission for the husband to pin his wife under his will. It's a choice the wife makes to place herself under the care and protection of her husband as an act of trust and respect.

Fifth – Which – if the husband is paying attention to and following the instruction for him – should be easy for his wife to do.

Twice as many words are used to instruct husbands compared to wives in this passage.

I'll let you insert your own punchlines.

The gist of which is this: the husbands is to love his wife as sacrificially as Jesus does His church.

Which is how?

He gave His life for it!

So, the husband is here instructed to be the head of his wife – which – to the best of my understanding means this: that he considers her first, that he is the first to make a sacrifice - to give up something for her sake, that he leads with unselfishness, that he is the first to submit.

If the husband loves the wife as Christ loved the church, foot washing rather than demanding service and obedience will be the rule.

This then becomes a picture of the gospel: submission to love.

This then becomes the space for family.

In the OT...

Children were seen as a blessing from God (Ps. 127:5).

Children were commanded to honor and respect their parents (Ex. 20:12).

And children were to be taught daily in their homes about God and His ways (Deut. 6:1-25) – esp. the Exodus and the feasts and holy days of Israel.

In the NT...

It is much the same with a twist.

The most definitive text about children and parenting is found in Eph. 6:1-4.

**SLIDE 9. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise - "so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."*** (Eph. 6:1-3).

**SLIDE 10. *Parents, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*** (Eph. 6:4).

Sounds familiar, right? Except for this niggling word - "exasperate."

Parents are to avoid exasperating their children.

The Greek word here for “exasperate” is the word “parorgizete” – which implies exasperation or frustration. In practice – this means parents ought to avoid unfair or cruel behavior or blatant favoritism.

Instead, parents are to “bring them up” – to be personally responsible for raising their children – to teach them daily about God and His ways – esp. – we might say these days – about the gospel (in all its fullness), baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and life as a disciple of Jesus.

Speaking of whom – while Jesus blesses the children who were brought to him by their parents (Mk. 10:13-16) – and certainly He honored the family by living under their authority as he grew in wisdom and stature (Lk. 2:41-52) - Jesus also makes it clear that our biological families are secondary to obeying the will of God – and even to those who follow it – who form the family of God.

Here’s the scene: Jesus is teaching, and his mom stops in to see him.

Picking up the story in Mk. 3...

**SLIDE 11. *Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”***

**SLIDE 12. *“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk. 3:31-35).***

Jesus postponed talking to his mom to finish his teaching!

What?!

So – in a real sense – the new community of faith which emerges through belief in Jesus Christ is family for believers.

For those who are married, single, or have family!

All are welcome.

All are included.

By faith.

In Jesus.

Submission to His love places us in His family – where we challenge and encourage each other to follow God’s will – to live a life like Christ – which is the same thing.

TAKE OUT

**SLIDE 13. Leader: We believe that God designed life to begin in a family and be blessed by the family.**

**SLIDE 14. Congregation: Even more, God desires all people to become part of the family of faith.**

**SLIDE 15. Leader: The blessing of God is on those who receive God's gift of singleness.**

**SLIDE 16. Congregation: We bless them and receive them fully as members and ministers in the family of faith.**

**SLIDE 17. Leader: The blessing of God is on those who receive God's gift of marriage.**

**SLIDE 18. Congregation: We bless them and ask them to love, forgive, and submit to their partners in the spirit of Christ.**

**SLIDE 19. Congregation: In the beginning, God established marriage as the union of one man and one woman for lifelong companionship, intimacy, and the nurture of children.**

**SLIDE 20. Congregation: We commit ourselves to uphold the honor of the marriage covenant.**

**SLIDE 21. Congregation: O Lord, keep us from temptation. Strengthen us to flee any desire for sexual union beyond the bounds of marriage. Fill us with compassion and wisdom to bring healing to the faltering and the fallen.**

**SLIDE 22. Leader: The blessing of God is on those who receive God's gift of children.**

**SLIDE 23. Congregation: We bless them and ask that God would strengthen them for the many challenges of parenting.**

**SLIDE 24. Congregation: May they bring up their children to love and serve God, by instructing them in the faith, disciplining them with gentleness, blessing them with favor, and not provoking them to anger.**

**SLIDE 25. Congregation: May their children respond with love, respect, and obedience, maturing as believers who take their own place in the family of faith.**