



SESSION 1 — Sex and the Single

- Pastor Keith -

21st Century America closely resembles the 1st Century Roman Empire—fornication, prostitution, and debauchery; adultery and polygamy; homosexuality; and widespread abortion or infanticide. Then and now, culture is characterized by the “passion of lust like the gentiles” (1 Peter 2:11-12) and “everyone [does] what [is] right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Ephesians 4:17 puts it this way, “They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” What The Sixties started, the turn of the century hastened, and “Moral or Sexual Revolution” will undoubtedly be a key historical description for the time we are living in—first a revolution in personal sexuality, then a powerful agenda to liberate sexual orientation (LGB), and now a losing battle to less than half of one percent of our society who considers themselves transgender.

Clearly, then, when we, the people of God, gather together to discuss sexuality and beauty, we must understand at the outset that we will be very counter-cultural! Furthermore, we are all Millennials and most of us are single—and that reality only further ostracizes us from the masses of our peers in this area of consideration.

But we do not need to be discouraged or afraid, for we are, after all, not from around here. Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 2:11, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles [citizens of heaven] to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” And, we don’t need to be intimidated or doubtful, for we are in the right. In the very next verse, Peter encourages, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

When it comes to sexuality and the people of God in any culture, Paul frames our worldview and ethic well in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Our purpose in this session is to consider “how to control our own bodies in holiness and honor” in the context we find ourselves in—Millennial singles in the middle of a sexual revolution.

KEY HEART ISSUES

1. Truth (authority) — Who will you listen to?

The issue is whether or not there is an absolute truth that provides us with clear and compelling answers to a myriad of sexual questions. And if we conclude that there is (and there is!), then the issue is whether or not we will submit to that. What our generation needs is a fresh commitment to Joshua’s mantra—“as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15)!

2. Faith (belief) — Who will you believe?

In November 2014, christianmingle.com conducted an informal study asking Christian singles between the ages of 18 and 59, “Would you have sex before marriage?” 63% of the respondents indicated yes. This provoked one Christian leader (and board member for christianmingle.com) to label us a generation of sexual atheists, writing, “Practical sexual atheism among Christians says God can speak into some things but not sex. This ultimate expression of self-deception and loss of mind goes all the way back to the garden, when a certain character asked Adam and Eve: ‘Did God really say that?’ They took the bait and, apparently, so are the majority of single Christians in the garden of love, sex and dating. They are listening to the voice that says, ‘Eat and have your eyes

opened.’ Like the first couple, God’s single men and women are letting fear win over faith and curiosity win over Christ with inevitable and untold prices to pay” (<http://bit.ly/1SAWwC5>).

3. **Love (worship) — Who will you worship?**

The sex culture encourages you to worship you. However it would define love, it is neither divinely-centered, nor others-focused. You become what you worship (Psalm 115:4-8; 1 John 3:2), and if you worship at the altar of sex, you will become enslaved, empty, embarrassed, and destructive. Instead, “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37), and you will discover “the path of life,” “fullness of joy,” and “pleasures forever more” (Psalm 16:11).

KEY PRINCIPLES (1 CORINTHIANS 7)

1. **God is sovereign over your status (vv. 1-9, 17).**

Our status is a “gift” (v. 7), “assignment” (v. 17), and “calling” (v. 17). Marriage and singleness are equally viable and valuable.

a. **Marriage is a gift, and sex is good (vv. 2-5, 9).**

Verse 2 makes it clear that marriage (having one’s “own wife/husband”) is the only context in which a sexual solution is allowable for the issue of passion. Many biblical passages affirm the gift of marriage (Genesis 2:18, 21-25; Proverbs 18:22; Ephesians 5:22-33) and the goodness of sex in marriage (Proverbs 5:15-16; Song of Solomon).

b. **Singleness is a gift, and abstinence from sex is good (v. 1, 7a, 8).**

1 Corinthians 7 is a chapter in which Paul is actually elevating singleness. In light of verse 1, MacArthur suggests that “some [in the church] had the notion that because of all the sexual sin and marital confusion, it would be better to be single, even more spiritual to be celibate. This could lead some falsely pious people to advocate divorce in order to be single” (*MacArthur Study Bible*). Therefore, while he in no way undermines the value or blessing of marriage, Paul

does actually elevate singleness in this passage. This is particularly evident in how he strongly encourages the believers to embrace the “gift” of singleness if that is theirs (v. 7b), in how he expresses wistfulness that more believers were like him in singleness (v. 7, 8), and in how he argues for the benefits of singleness (vv. 25-35).

Furthermore, what is beautiful in this text for single millennial Christians to consider is what Paul says in verse 1, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’” Did you catch that?! Paul is actually suggesting that it is “good” to *not* have sex! Let that sink in for a minute! How counter-cultural is that, for while marriage has fallen on hard times, new shrines are built to sex every day. Paul’s inspired perspective is a nugget of truth that Christian singles need to meditate on, chose to believe, and prayerfully submit to.

All Christians must remember that sex is a gift or a shadow, and so singles can still be fulfilled by the Giver of that gift or the reality behind the shadow—God! “It is not good for man to be alone” was met immediately by marriage, but never only by marriage. Married individuals can feel terribly alone, or worse, can be spiritually separated from God. In contrast, a single individual can know intimacy with God through Christ, and can enjoy the abolishing of loneliness in communion with Him, in fellowship with His people, and in mission to the lost.

God has many gifts that He gives to satisfy His people. When He withholds one, He gives another, and they are all “good and perfect” (James 1:17). Therefore, never forget, dear friend, what both singles and married people need to understand—sex is just a gift...what, then, must the Giver be like! God is indeed sovereign over your status, and into whatever state He calls you, He can there satisfy you.

2. Your contentment is key to your satisfaction (vv. 17-24).

Paul introduces two other statuses—circumcision vs. uncircumcision and slavery vs. freedom—to further teach how his principles of divine placement and personal contentment apply in our lives. In each of these areas of status, there is admittedly tension in our battle for contentment.

a. There is a tension in our responsibility (vv. 17, 20-21).

Paul uses the status of circumcision vs. uncircumcision to make this point, which we can apply to marriage vs. singleness.

- Acceptance of one's state (vv. 17, 20-21a)
- Allowance to change it (v. 21b)

Applied to marriage vs. singleness:

- “Married in Christ”—accept it (vv. 10-11, 27) vs. allowance to change it (vv. 12-16)
- “Single in Christ”—accept it (v. 1, 7a, 8, 27) vs. allowance to change it (v. 2, 9, 28)

This is the tension that Christians need to thoughtfully, prayerfully, and joyfully live in every day. God's will is best!

b. There is a tension in our relationships (v. 22).

Paul uses the status of slavery vs. freedom to make this point (a paradox), which we can apply to marriage vs. singleness.

- *If married, you should be “divorced unto the Lord” (paralleling the exhortation in v. 22b; cf. Luke 14:26).*
- *If single, you are “married to the Lord” (paralleling the encouragement of v. 22a).*

So, with Paul, we really do need to learn the lesson of “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11-13).

c. There is a truth to rest upon — freedom through contentment (vv. 23-24).

- *Don't be enslaved to anyone's perspective (v. 23b).*

Don't be shaken or coerced by well-intended match-makers, belittling married couples, discontent friends, or sexual revolutionaries.

- *Be enslaved to God's gracious placement (vv. 23a, 24).*

God has been gracious to you, so you can trust Him and rest in Him! In whatever condition you were called, remain there *with God!*

3. You should count the cost of marriage (vv. 25-35).

a. Difficulties (vv. 26-28)

- Social (v. 26)
- Familial (v. 28) — conflicts, demands, adjustments; sin, relational tension, financial pressure, children, sorrow and loss

b. Distractions (vv. 29-35) from the eternal (v. 29a)

- Emotional (v. 30a) — Paul is encouraging us to not ride the ups and downs (easier for a single).
- Material (vv. 30b-31) — Paul is advocating a “wartime lifestyle” (easier for a single).
- Relational (vv. 32-35)
 - Married person — “anxious about worldly things, how to please one's spouse”
 - Single person — “anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord”: This can produce “notable and constant service” (NET)!

4. Your passions must be controlled (1 Thess. 4:1-5; 1 Peter 2:11-12).

a. God's standard

- You may desire sex and consider marriage (1 Corinthians 7:9). Aren't you glad you have that permission. ☺ But want to know, enjoy, and honor Christ more! This will be a decision you need to make over and over again. [Dating Note: Only date a believer!]
- You must abstain from premarital sex (Deuteronomy 22:13-19; Matthew 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; Revelation 14:4).
 - Cultural Statistics
 - The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy discovered 80 percent of unmarried evangelicals between the ages of 18 and 29 had engaged in sex. Using a more stringent definition of "evangelical," the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) recently reported that 44 percent of millennial evangelicals had sex outside marriage (<http://bit.ly/1SAZXbV>).
 - Such a cavalier practice of premarital sex goes back a long way, as is evidenced by Dr. Lawrence B. Finer's 2002 research study in which he attempted to reveal "Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954-2003" (Public Health Reports journal, January-February 2007, pp. 73-78). This study was provoked by a desire to discover what kind of success was being had by the increasing amounts of advocacy, funding, and programmatic efforts towards encouraging Americans to abstain from sexual intercourse until marriage.

Data from this 2002 survey indicate that by age 20, 75% had had premarital sex, and by age 44, 95% of respondents had had premarital sex (only 3.3% had abstained until marriage, with the other 1.3% having never married nor had sex). Even among those who abstained until at least age 20, 81% had had premarital sex by age 44.

Among women turning 15 between 1954 and 1963, at least 48% had had premarital sex by age 20 (73% by age 25). Among women turning 15 between 1964 and 1973, at least 65% had had premarital sex by age 20 (86% by age 25). Among those turning 15 between 1974 and 1983, 72% had had premarital sex by age 20 (88% by age 25). Among those turning 15 between 1984 and 1993, 76% had had premarital sex by age 20 (89% by age 25; 94% by age 30). These statistics also clearly revealed that the longer someone waited to get married, the higher the changes were that they would engage in premarital sex. Furthermore, the median age at first premarital sex in 2002 was 17.4-years-old, down from

The study concludes with this disappointing paragraph: "Premarital sex as normative behavior is not surprising in an era when men and women typically marry in their mid-to-late twenties [perceptive correlation]. Indeed, not only is premarital sex nearly universal by age 30, but it is also very common at much younger ages [unfortunate reality]. Evidence from the

past 50 years suggests that establishing abstinence until marriage as normative behavior is a challenging policy goal [correct assessment]. Instead, these findings argue for education and interventions that provide young people with the skills and information they need to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases once they become sexually active [unfortunate application].”

- The Spring 2016 edition of New York Magazine carried a story titled, “Single Women Are Now the Most Potent Political Force in America.” In it, the author, Rebecca Traister, writes that for the first time in American history, single women outnumber married women. She then goes on to explain that their worldview has changed so much that they are decoupling sex from marriage, children from marriage, vocation and meaning in life from marriage, their future vision of the good life from marriage. In other words, for many young women, writes Traister, marriage is simply not a part of their future expectation, as it would ruin their lives. The sexual ethic running throughout her article demonstrates that sex has been so absolutely divorced from marriage now, that rather than marriage being the only non-stigma context for sexual intimacy, it is now considered an outdated institution and a part of the problem.

- In March 2015, the Public Religion Research Institute released the results of a recent survey entitled, “How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health.” In a commentary on that research survey, Chris Martin summarizes, “The only thing Millennials are black-and-white on when it comes to matters of sexual morality is that you aren’t allowed to be black-and-white on sexual morality. Before, it was stigma to sleep with someone before marriage or with a partner outside of your marriage. Today, college students are shamed as cowards and prudes for retaining their virginity on campuses across the country. Before, you kept your sexual activity quiet for fear of shame; today, you keep your sexual inactivity quiet for the same reason. Before, the sexually moral judged the sexually amoral; today, the sexually amoral judge the sexually moral. If you have a sexual ethic more solid than your average Jello mold, you’re free game for Millennial judgment. Millennials are incredibly judgmental when it comes to sexuality — if you’re not doing something you’re a loser, and if you have convictions you’re a bigot” (<http://wp.me/p4D98V-kl>).
- Biblical Support — Premarital sex often de-incentivizes young men to grow up, take responsibility, and lead their home and family. Premarital sex wounds a young woman’s heart, perhaps imperceptibly at first but undeniably over time, as she trades in covenant benefits without covenant security. This is not the way God designed sex to fulfill us.

- Deuteronomy 22:13-19 — Under Mosaic Law, God’s heart for chastity before marriage is clear.
- Matthew 1:18-19 — Joseph is considered honorable for how he dealt with the apparent infidelity of his betrothed.
- 1 Corinthians 7:2, 9 — Clearly, marital sex is the God-given solution to sexual burning.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 — God’s will is sanctification and specifically abstinence from “sexual immorality.”
- Hebrews 13:4 — “Sexual immorality” is not just “adultery,” for they are both listed as separate entities. Therefore, any kind of non-marital sex is dishonorable, defiled, and condemned.
- Revelation 14:4 — Those who are marked as belonging to the Father are described as those “who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.”

[Dating Note: Only date in the realm of accountability.]

- *You should abstain from cohabitation.*
 - *Principle of temptation* (Romans 13:14) — Ask yourself, “Will this make sin easier?”
 - *Principle of testimony* (Romans 14:16; Ephesians 5:7-17; cf. Romans 14:13, 21; Colossians 4:5; Matthew 5:13-16) — Ask yourself, “How will this impact others, both believers and unbelievers?”

Piper, “The main reason is that when a man and a woman live together it says crystal clear to the world that having sex together without

marriage is okay. That’s what it says. Now, you say you’re a Christian. Do you want to say that sex before marriage is okay? And if you want to say that, then something is profoundly wrong! And if you say, ‘That’s their problem,’ you’re not loving people. It’s not their problem. It is your problem. You should take steps to communicate truth, and the sanctity of sex in marriage is a glorious truth, and you should want to hallow it and cherish it” (<http://bit.ly/248p5sF>).

- *Principle of common sense* (Proverbs 4:7) — Ask yourself, “What would future me say to myself or how might I one day answer this question for my kids?”

Piper, “And the last thing I might say is to the guy: ‘Sixteen years from now—it’s going to be here just like that—your daughter says she wants to move in with her boyfriend. What would you say? She says, “Dad, it’s their problem! We’re not going to have sex!” What would you say? Well, say it to yourself now”” (<http://bit.ly/248p5sF>).

- *You must abstain from all lust (Ephesians 5:3-12).*

The NIV translates this passage to command that we should entertain “not even a hint” of sexual lust mentally, verbally, visually, or physically.

So, guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23)! Take heed to what you watch, what you listen to, what you say, who you hang out with, what and how you think! And, motivate yourself by remembering your new position in Christ (Ephesians 4:1, 17; 5:1-2, 8).

b. God’s satisfaction

While withholding the gift of marriage, God is prolonging the gift of singleness. And since He is the Giver, He can still satisfy (Psalm 16:11; John 4:1-42; James 1:17).

c. **God's strategies**

- *Confess and repent to receive forgiveness (1 John 1:9; Ephesians 4:17-5:3; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hosea 2).*
- *Surrender to God's ownership (1 Corinthians 6:12-20) and will (1 Thessalonians 4:1-5).*
- *See sin's stupidity (The Purity Principle) and consequences.*

- *Personal consequences: guilt, shame, regret*

Sexual sin robs you of the peace, stability, and impact of righteousness, and instead leaves you feeling horribly (1 Corinthians 6:18). Perhaps this is why the music of the popular folk band, Mumford and Sons, resonates so strongly with Christians. For instance, consider the question asked in "White Blank Page":

*Can you lie next to her
And give her your heart
As well as your body
And can you lie next to her
And confess your love
As well as your folly
And can you kneel before the king
And say I'm clean, I'm clean?*

- *Relational consequences: it hurts and molds others (David and his sons)*
- *Spiritual consequences: deception and damnation (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:6)*
- *Don't just hate sin, hate temptation and avoid its sources (Proverbs 7; James 1:13-18; 2 Peter 2:8).*
- *Utilize Christian community (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; "one another" passages).*
- *Fight fire with fire—replace the idolizing of the gifts with the worship of the Giver, an "over-mastering positive passion."*