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## THE SINGLE MAN

You can become God's sexual man in one of two ways: first, if you are married (or are preparing to marry) or second, if for reasons of service to the Lord you are called to a single, celibate life. You cannot be God's *sexual* man in a willingly prolonged state of singleness that is not "for the Kingdom."

There, I've said it, and I believe it. Admittedly, I love being married so much that I ache to see every man find a good wife, but I do believe that what I have said reflects more than personal prejudice. I believe that it is clearly backed up by Scripture.

*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18).* I cannot imagine any interpretation of this scripture other than: it is not good for man to be alone. When God said this, He was not suggesting that a man needed to join a softball team, or that he should go down to the mall and mingle, or even that he should join a church with a good singles ministry. No, immediately after these words, He added, *I will make a helper fit for him.* God's primary solution for man's "not good" aloneness is marriage.

I don't believe that God said "not good" as in sinful, although sin might lie in the background as a reason for the man's having chosen singleness, but I believe He said "not good" as in sad. In a way, chosen singleness defies our nature. Let me illustrate.

Outside the home where we raised our children, we had a bird feeder, the "squirrel proof" kind. For years two mourning doves, my favorite birds, visited it. They were too large and heavy to get on the feeder, so they spent their time on the deck below the feeder scarfing up the seeds that the other birds scattered. Fulfilling my Adamic role of naming the creatures, I named these two doves Victoria and Albert. They, true to their kind, mated for life, and I never saw one without the other.

When we moved to our new home, the same bird feeder was set up and was visited daily by a single mourning dove. Seeing the bird each day, whom I named Lonesome Dove, and whom I assumed was a widow or widower, I never saw him without feeling a tinge of sadness. His single state was not good; it was sad.

Mourning doves are monogamous; they find one mate and stay with it as long as they both live. This is instinctive, so they have no ability to choose to do otherwise.

As with the mourning doves, God has programmed or built into our nature, the desire to find a mate, a wife in our case, and to stay with her so long as we both shall live. That this is not just a Judeo-Christian teaching or tradition, but rather, is built into our nature

as evidenced by the existence of marriage in every age and every culture. But we are not animals or birds. We are made in the image of God, and as such we have been given the freedom to make choices. Some men choose to be single—for reasons that don't seem to fit God's greater plan for mankind—and this is not good.

The gift of sexuality that God has given us achieves its purpose, and brings us the greatest joy, only when we give it away. The only ways we can give it away, and stay true to our God-given nature, are to give it to our wives in marriage or to the Lord in what I believe it would be accurate to call “consecrated celibacy”. An intentional extended single life is one in which we hold back the gift for ourselves. Even if we don't use our sexuality directly for ourselves through fornication or masturbation, in failing to fulfill one of God's purposes for man—to marry and procreate—we do not receive the full blessings of the gift of sexuality, and this is sad; it is not good.

Marriage has taken a phenomenal beating in our culture in the past couple of generations. Well before the frontal attack on marriage that would re-define it to include the joining of two men or two women, it had suffered a severe diminishment in its importance and centrality to our life together as human beings. The idea that marriage provided the only proper setting for sexual intercourse has all but vanished from popular culture. No fault divorce has diminished the idea of marriage as a permanent commitment. The feminist movement, which once directly demeaned marriage and motherhood, still has its influence in convincing many women that marriage and motherhood are not enough for a woman to achieve a fulfilled life. Prosperity has brought an increasing materialism which favors the delay of marriage and supports some men and women in prolonging their adolescence into their thirties and forties.

We would be foolish to claim that this hasn't affected Christians and our view of marriage. Although committed Christians are more likely to marry, and to marry younger, still the number of long-term singles in our midst is increasing. It behooves any single Christian man to seriously consider God's statement that it is not good for man to be alone.

### **WHY IT IS NOT GOOD**

In Chapter 14 I mentioned two reasons why marriage is good for a man. It follows that for the same reasons an extended single life—other than for Christian service—is *not* good for a man. I would like to elaborate on those two reasons and offer one more.

The first reason related to Paul's rather difficult statement that *it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion* (1 Corinthians 7:9). On the surface this could be interpreted as using a wife to keep you from lusting, or even worse, using a wife as an outlet for your lust. That we might interpret the passage this way shows how far we have come in separating love and sex. How could *using* a wife ever be an act of love?

Christopher West offers a most helpful way of interpreting this passage. He points out that Paul is not suggesting using a wife as a means of *relieving* lust, but taking a wife as a

*remedy* for man's lust.<sup>20</sup> A wife is not there to provide relief for a man's recurring bouts with lust, but over time, in marriage, the man will more and more come to experience sexual desire as God intended it, a desire to give himself to his beloved as an expression of love. As this happens, a man's tendency to lust will diminish. Thus we have a remedy for man's almost universal tendency to lust sexually. In the single state such progressive change is not likely to occur.

The second reason offered in Chapter 14 as *one* of the good reasons to marry is that it is a remedy for the narcissism that so readily befalls men. To remain single, is not to avail oneself of this remedy, and thus put oneself at risk of growing in narcissism and selfishness. This is not good.

The longer a man lives with only himself to care for, the more entrenched can become his desires for a certain way of life, the more radical it would appear to invite another person to influence every decision of his life.

Narcissism or selfishness is so rooted in our fallen nature as men, that for most of us only a radical means can be effective in overcoming it. The gift of oneself to a wife in marriage, and the working out of that gift in every daily decision of life over the ensuing decades is such a radical means. The only other such radical means I know of is the gift of our sexuality to the Lord for purposes of ministry.

It may appear that I am suggesting that the reason a man marries is to avoid sin. That is not the point here. A theme running through this book is that God has given man marriage as a magnificent gift. I am dwelling on the negatives of the long-term single life only in support of the statement God made immediately after creating man that it is not good for man to be alone. To reiterate this point, the man who chooses long-term singleness for reasons other than Christian service, puts himself in a place of danger with respect to the sins of lust and selfishness, and this is not good.

Another reason why a man should marry is clearly positive. It relates to the complementarity between man and woman and our God-given desire for completion. God intentionally made us incomplete in that he posited the masculine qualities primarily in man and the feminine qualities primarily in woman. Man and woman each *need* the qualities of the other in order to become all God created us to be. Man and woman can avail themselves of these qualities found in the other as friends or business partners or brother and sister, but this is not the same thing. God's plan is for union, a joining of man and woman in something that goes far deeper than a partnership. We enter into each other—in more than the physical sense—and become something more than the sum of our two parts. A good analogy would be hydrogen and oxygen; standing alone they are what they are. Joined together they become something quite different, water. A man who is strong in the masculine qualities, and does not possess much in the feminine qualities and does not have a wife whose feminine qualities offset his masculinity, may have a tendency to become a coldly practical machine like man. Most men *need* to be married, because they need a measure of the feminine to be a part of them. God made it this way.

<sup>20</sup> West, *The Theology of the Body Explained*, 225.

Having said all of this about why I believe most men should marry—I would guess that some of my single readers are quite angry at me by now—let me address those who are single. Apart from those who are called to a celibate life, there are two groups of men who should be single; they are those who are not yet ready to marry and those who because of the current state of their lives should not marry.

### **THOSE NOT READY TO MARRY**

Clearly there are young men who are still in the normal stages of growth into manhood wherein they are not yet ready to fulfill the obligations of being a husband and father. Although they might not look at it this way, they are preparing to get married, or should be, through getting an education, developing their manhood, attaining a degree of emotional stability, etc. In most cultures, and not many years ago in ours, when a boy had gone as far as he would go in getting an education, and had become employable, he was ready to marry. From here on out, I am going to refer to these men as “not yet married” rather than “single” as I think this term acknowledges God’s good remedy for our aloneness. The not yet married group would include the young man who is willing and able to marry, but has not yet met up with the woman God has for him. The man who is preparing to marry, one would assume, does not fall into the Lord’s “not good” category. The same could be said for the man who is exploring whether or not God has called him to a celibate life,

### **THOSE WHO SHOULD NOT MARRY**

The other type of not yet married man is the man who because of certain circumstances in his life should not get married. He knows that he cannot enter into a marriage and fulfill a husband’s God-given role and therefore should stay single, at least for the time being. The choice in this case is not bad—it comes from exercising God-given wisdom and maybe from concern for the woman who might be hurt by marrying such a man—but the circumstances that prompted this decision are usually “bad”. The man may be in prison, may be an addict of some sort, may be in the earliest stages of overcoming homosexuality, or he may, because of wounds from childhood, not really be able to love. These situations are “not good”, but their remedy is not marriage, rather it is change and healing. Then marriage could be appropriate and right.

### **THE CONSECRATED CELIBATE MAN**

I suspect that many of my fellow evangelicals, among whom consecrated celibacy does not have a strong tradition, are somewhat uneasy with 1 Corinthians 7:38, where Paul writes, *So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.* Better? The clear implication here is that the celibate man has some kind advantage over the married man, quite likely a closer connection with Christ, and this concept troubles many of us. But this is the word of God, and we cannot dismiss it; we need to explore it.

Paul’s most direct and practical reason for calling the single state “better” is stated quite clearly in verses 32 to 34 of the same chapter: *I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the*

*married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.* The things of the Lord referred to are our service to Him and our devotional lives. In certain circumstances we can serve the Lord better if our heart and our energy are not divided between Him and a family.

John Paul's Theology of the Body teaching can help us further with this as he explores this "better": passage in great depth. He does this in a way that can help all Christians, even those not in a church where there is a celibate priesthood or religious orders where vows of celibacy are common.<sup>21</sup> But, before he offers his explanation of Paul's "better" way, the Pope is careful to stress that this passage in no way meant to disparage marriage. He says quite clearly that the best life for the man called by God to marriage is marriage, and the best way for a man called to celibacy is celibacy.

To get into John Paul's Biblical analysis, I need to again address God's purposes for our sexuality. In discussing why God gave us our sexuality in Chapter 3, I intentionally did not mention one additional reason. I held back on it because I believe that only when we start to gain a deeper understanding of marriage as the one-flesh union of a man and a woman can we take it to the next level, its being a model or an image or a reflection of a far more magnificent union, the union of Christ and His church. This is a key part of John Paul's teaching.

Jesus chose to describe our relationship with Him as being like that of a bridegroom and his bride. The fact that He chose such an analogy would indicate that this was the best analogy He could draw—and have us understand it. He is the bridegroom; we, the church, are the bride.

In light of this analogy, marriage becomes a sacrament, an outward and visible sign of a spiritual reality. In marriage, we stand in for Christ in our relationships with our wives. In this analogy, this sacramental view, we are given a better understanding of both how Christ loves us and what it means to be a husband

The consecrated celibate man does not experience sexuality in marriage as a sacrament or sign; rather he, with his heart and soul, experiences union with Christ Himself, albeit in an anticipatory sense. Stated another way, his manhood and his sexuality are consciously given to Christ rather than to his wife. If God's calling on his life is to celibacy, the constant remembrance and renewal of this gift sustains him in the celibate life. His life is "better" in that it more closely resembles our ultimate union with Christ than does Christian marriage which is only a picture of that union.

I think we can also see the "superiority" of the celibate life in the Beatitudes. You may recall from Chapter 9 that some of us in Regeneration have found that our best immediate response to sexual temptation is to bring Jesus into the picture. We look at or hold a cross or crucifix, we start praising Him, we say the name Jesus over and over again. In doing this we not only fend off temptation, but we are drawing closer to the Lord. The consecrated celibate man, one who does not have a "normal" outlet for his sexual desires, is likely to draw close to the Lord in these circumstances even more than a married man.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 341-343

that the value of his gift to the Lord is established, and in giving the gift of his sexuality to the Lord, he draws closer to the One who can meet all of his needs.

The man who is called to a consecrated celibate life, and lives it out, has become the sexual man God called him to be.

### **EVERY SINGLE MAN'S VULNERABILITY TO COMPROMISE**

Every single man, whether he is the not yet married man, the consecrated celibate man, or even the determined bachelor can be vulnerable to compromise in his efforts to stay chaste. One of those vulnerabilities is to change his beliefs in the face of moral failures.

Faced with the situation wherein we are doing things that violate our beliefs, we have two choices. We can try to change our behavior, or we can change our beliefs. Some liberal churches, and whole denominations in fact, have chosen the second course. In the area of sexuality, they have changed what they once believed were God's standards for sexuality. They are people of the type Paul spoke of when he referred to *those who practice such things deserve to die because they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them* (Romans 1:32). Theirs is truly a frightening state.

Most single Christian men, facing a situation in which their behavior in sexual matters doesn't line up with their beliefs, don't go this far. But, in today's culture, many face an enormous temptation to compromise. And many do compromise, not so much by changing the meaning of God's words, but by attaching greater reality to what the "world" or "science" or "common sense" says than to the teachings of Scripture and the church which they may dismiss as "theological" or "theoretical ideals". This thinking was reflected in what the Episcopal bishop I mentioned earlier said to me when justifying his revisionist stands on sexual matters; "We know what God's word says, but....." and then he went on to tell me what was "realistic".

The most common rationalizations about sexuality which claim the support of science or practicality are false; they are myths. But when they offer a justification for what a man craves doing, they have great power. Here are three of them:

**Myth #1, Everybody Does It** – Alfred Kinsey, with his world changing book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, is the modern father of this myth. Kinsey, whose sexual inclinations and behaviors ran to all sorts of extremes, certainly had a lot to justify. He did this through seriously flawed surveys that showed a world which, while still acknowledging the rightness of traditional sexual morality, was acting with extreme hypocrisy because, in effect, most of us in actuality were "doing it." He got the results he wanted in part by including in his survey populations large numbers of prisoners and men who frequented gay bars.

Kinsey's books found an audience ready and anxious to find a justification for whatever sexual life they were living or longed to live. The belief that traditional standards of sexual morality were unrealistic gave them the justification they needed to pursue their fantasies..

Kinsey's work has been largely discredited, but his rationale lives on. Especially in the media and in the academic world, the philosophy of "if it feels good, it must be alright" is promoted as a societal norm with missionary zeal.

For the single man struggling with a conflict between his beliefs and what he craves doing, the Kinsey message is a strong justifier for engaging in lustful behavior. It gives him a rationale that sees a certain inevitability in sexual acting out. Then, some men move on to the next step in accepting the lie, that it is *abnormal* to abstain, that he is somehow weird if he refrains from sexual activity. At this point the seductive power of the myth has him in its clutches. Many are exposed to this myth early in life as most public school sex education is based on the assumption that having sex outside of marriage is inevitable—so bring out the bananas and the condoms.

**Myth #2, Repression Leads to Explosion** – This myth goes back to much earlier times than Kinsey. It typically pictures the up-tight Puritan type Christian who, after years of denying and suppressing his sexuality, can no longer take the frustration and he plunges into a life of debauchery, maybe stalking and raping teenage girls in his village. This myth still has widespread credence. The Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in the Clinton administration publicly used it to justify sex education programs in public schools that encouraged sexual activity by teens (so long as it was "safe").

This myth has no basis in fact. Except in novels aimed at upsetting moral standards, I have never heard any evidence, even anecdotal evidence, to support this belief. Over the past thirty years I have worked with men who dealt with every conceivable sexual obsession, some of whom had gone to prison time for what they had done sexually, and in that time I have never encountered a man who fit this picture of having lived for years suppressing his sexual desires and then finally breaking down and losing all control. To the contrary, most of these men had been acting out since their early teens, if not with other people, at least with pornography and daily or more frequent masturbation. Their problem was not having repressed their sexuality, but rather, having indulged it too much in their youth.

A corollary to this myth is that good mental health requires having sexual outlets. Again there is no more truth in this than in the old belief that if you masturbate too often, you will go blind. Jesus Himself never availed himself of a sexual outlet, and surely He was the most emotionally and psychologically healthy man who ever lived. We have seen examples (and probably known) single Christian men who lived wonderful healthy lives for years without engaging in any kind of genital sexual behavior. Pope John Paul II, who inspired much of this book, is almost certainly one of them.

On a lesser scale, the struggling single man laying in bed late at night, may simply tell himself, "If I don't masturbate, I will never get to sleep." This is factually wrong, as is the belief that, "If I don't give into this, it will never go away." Sexual desire and arousal does eventually subside, even without ejaculation. And self-control doesn't lead to madness. To the contrary, it is quite a healthy thing.

**Myth #3, Use It Or Lose It** – For the single man who hopes to one day get married this can be a real fear. If I don't keep my sexual plumbing active, it won't work when I need it too. This is an understandable belief, because in other areas of the body it is valid. Recent studies of older people have shown that those who keep their brains active, even with things like crossword puzzles or video games, retain their brain functions longer than those who don't. Also, many of us have seen that when we don't exercise our muscles for a considerable length of time, they shrink and lose their strength.

But with one exception I have not been able to find any evidence that this applies to our sexuality. The exception was with older men who had gone through prostate surgery. Those who pushed themselves to engage in sexual activity as soon as possible after surgery were less likely to experience erectile dysfunction than those who had not.<sup>22</sup> It appeared that in these older men lack of sexual engagement caused muscles in the penis to lose some of their flexibility, and this interfered with the penis's ability to expand.

If there were hard evidence that "use it or lose it" was valid beyond this small group of post-operative older men, it would seem that those who advocate sexual license, the same people who propagate Myths 1 and 2, if not shouting it from the housetops, would be plastering it all over the internet.

#### **THE TRUTH: ABSTINENCE IS EASIER THAN MODERATION**

I can think of three reasons, one physical, one psychological, and one spiritual, why, when it comes to sexual behavior, abstinence is easier to achieve than moderation. This works almost automatically to the advantage of the consecrated celibate man, and can work to the advantage of the not yet married man.

In the physical realm, our bodies were made to act "automatically". That's why we can walk or speak almost spontaneously. Our bodies have memories we call habits. In the area of our sexuality, when we encounter a stimulus, and we respond with sexual thoughts or sexual arousal, and we repeat this stimulus-response process over and over, it becomes more or less imbedded in us as an involuntary response. In this regard sexual behavior begets sexual behavior. The way we break habits is by stopping the activity (in any way possible—sometimes finding a substitute response). Abstinence begets abstinence.

Patterns of sexual response are further instilled in us by the fact that, as we discussed earlier, pleasure producing chemicals are released in the brain by sexual images or fantasies. The brain remembers this, remembers the pleasure, and wants to experience it over and over again. This is why all 12-Step programs stress abstinence, not moderation. The "first drink" activates the pleasure seeking or stress relieving desires. With abstinence those desires tend to become more dormant.

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<sup>22</sup> *The American Journal of Medicine*, Volume 121, Issue 7, Pages 592-596, (July, 2008) "Regular Intercourse Protects Against Erectile Dysfunction: Tampere Aging Male Urologic Survey".



Psychologically, moderation, or quotas or tapering off, seldom work because they produce a mindset that in the face of every temptation says that engagement is an option. A battle ensues in which one side says, "It's okay this time", and with the first feelings of sexual pleasure surging through the brain and the body, this argument more often than not will carry the day. The man who can say to himself an emphatic, "No, this isn't right", may not always obey his better self, but he is not weakened by the wedge of uncertainty. Men who go the abstinence route very often come to the place where in their deepest hearts certain behaviors such as using pornography or masturbation are no longer an option.

Spiritually—meaning in our relationship with God—moderation means that we are holding onto our sexuality as ours. We have not given it to God. It is the gift of our sexuality to God, permanently for the consecrated celibate man, and temporarily for the not yet married man, that empowers our ability to lead a chaste life. Moderation means that we consciously allow ourselves a measure of sin. If after a struggle we sin, we can experience God's grace in response to our true repentance and this can do great things for us spiritually. However, consciously allowing sin because we are tapering off, or because we are getting our limited quota, is a form of justifying sin, and this will actually keep us from both true repentance and from experiencing the wonderful grace of God.

#### **STEWARDS OF A PRECIOUS GIFT**

All men are stewards of their sexuality. God has entrusted us with this glorious, powerful gift of sexual desire and sexual experience to use as He has ordered. For the married man, that stewardship is for God and for his wife. For the not yet married man it is for God and his future wife, and for the consecrated celibate man, that stewardship is for God alone. Remembering who our sexuality belongs to, can be an essential element in living a chaste life. And hope for eventual marriage for the not yet married man, and for God to meet his needs for connection, completion and creation in a non-genital way in the consecrated celibate man, can help sustain them in their singleness.