

**Women's Bible Study – Autumn Ridge Church**  
**Unity in Marriage: 1 Corinthians 7 ~ Angie Pankratz**  
**February 22, 2017**



Now we are to the part of Paul's letter where he is going to answer specific questions that the Church of Corinth is asking him. It would be so helpful if we had the exact questions that the Corinthians had asked Paul but all we know is that some must have been on the topic of celibacy and marriage. It appears that some of the Corinthians felt that all believers should practice celibacy... even those that are married!?

This is all quite ironic when just in the last two chapters Paul had to address sexual immorality in the church and address those in the church who had an attitude that everything was permissible. Now the pendulum has swung the other way with certain believers feeling like those who married should refrain from touching their spouse. I decided to divide this chapter up by looking at the message that Paul has for those who are single, for those who are married and then concluding takeaways for all of us whether single, married, widowed engaged or whatever... No matter what state you are in there is plenty here for God to teach anyone.

Let's first look at the message Paul has (which we all know is the inspired Word of the Lord) here for singles. He said to be single is good. If you are single, God does not consider you incomplete. He does not pity you. You are just as an important member of the body of Christ as one who has been married and according to this passage, you may even be more of an asset to the Body of Christ than your peers that are married. I'm so sorry if this is not the message you have received from the world but even more so sorry if this is not the message you have received from fellow believers. Our attitude should be the same of Christ Jesus. Let's look at some specific verses here.

"I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do." 1 Cor. 7:7-8

"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. 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. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord." 1 Cor. 7:32-35.

Secondly, He says that being single is a gift. He basically says that you are most likely able to follow the Lord more passionately because of this gift you have. Can you imagine how Paul's ministry would have been different had he been married? Can you imagine how he would have been distracted had he had a wife and

several children as many men may have had during that era. Only Paul, a single man devoted to the Lord who had experienced the times of loneliness when he was deserted on more than one occasion by his fellow believers could assure those who were single that it was a gift. Only Paul, a single man who knew what it was like to be all alone in a jail cell as we read in Acts 23:11 could encourage those who are not in a marriage covenant that their covenant with the Lord will be more than sufficient. After all, the Lord himself appeared to Paul the second night in that jail cell and told him to take courage! Only Paul could tell the unmarried that God's grace is sufficient – that your singleness is a gift.

I have known many single people and I don't know many who have referred to their singleness as a gift. But like so many things there are seasons of our life that we have to walk through something we may not have chosen but can later see it as a "gift." There's the "gift" of moving to a town where you don't know anyone. There's the "gift" of unemployment. There's the "gift" of cancer. Our family has experienced all of these "gifts" at one time or another and I wouldn't have wanted anyone to tell me at the time that it was a gift...UNLESS... that person had walked that same journey. As I grieved each of those situations (or "gifts") I benefited greatly to hear from someone who was able to see God provide and bless through that "gift" that I never wanted to receive. This is why it was such a powerful message to hear from Paul that singleness is a gift.

Since I lack much personal experience on this topic, I asked a dear friend of mine to share her experience on being a single woman in church. You may know her. Her name is Karen Rucker. If you have ever attended a woman's event at this church you have likely benefited from her administrative and event planning skills. Karen and I have worked closely on various teams for over 10 years. She is too kind to tell you this but I will tell you that I am the weakest link on those teams. My responsibilities to my husband and my four kids have kept me from giving the 100% that Karen is able to give to these events. And I'm ok with that because I am called to serve my family first. However, in the same breath I will tell you that I have seen first hand that Karen's singleness has been a blessing to me, possibly to you and most likely to thousands of women in this area who have benefited from Karen's undivided devotion to the Lord. Here's what Karen had to tell me on the topic of singleness:

*In Chapter 7 of I Corinthians, Paul states, "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." As a single person, I have often wondered why Paul would call singleness a gift. If it is a gift, why for so much of my life have I felt it was more an unanswered prayer than a gift? As years go by, my understanding of the gift becomes clearer, not yet perfectly seen, but clearer.*

*There are some people who remain single because they choose to be single. I was never one of those people. My greatest desire was to be married and have children. Why would God, who loves to answer the prayers of His children, never answer my prayer for a spouse? Why would He deny me the children I so desired? How many times would well-meaning people say, "Why hasn't some*

man snatched up a nice, pretty girl like you"? I wish by this point in my life I had the answers to those questions. Instead I have come to the realization that one day in heaven I will know completely what remains a mystery today.

A few years ago, at a time in my life where being single didn't at all feel like a gift, Pastor Steer asked me whether I would be willing to let him interview me on the gift of singleness. Instead of having someone he could interview, he ended up with a woman crying in his office for an hour. One of the questions he asked me after we had talked a while was whether I could agree with Paul that singleness is a gift. At that time, while it didn't feel like something a mature Christian should say, I had to tell him no. However, during the last few years, I've considered that very question and can now tell you some ways that I truly believe singleness is a gift.

Paul's primary reason for wanting people to remain single is so that they can have an undivided devotion to the Lord. That is a high calling, and I know I am not completely undivided in my devotion to the Lord. However, in my singleness, God has brought many ministry opportunities to me. I have been able to spend time in God's Word, not just reading it, but really studying it. God has allowed me to teach His Word to a number of people through Precept Bible study. In addition, over ten years ago, God placed upon my heart the Devoted Hearts ministry. Through those conferences, thousands of women have had the opportunity to hear God's Word taught by some of the finest Bible teachers of our generation. While I could have been part of these ministries had I been married, I am sure I would not have been able to devote myself to them completely had I not been single. My hope and prayer is, that through these ministries, lives of women and men have been changed and that they have been drawn in to a deeper knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ.

In addition to serving in the church, God has given opportunity for me to be an involved daughter, sister, and aunt to my family. I have been able to spend time caring for elderly parents. I have been able to give my nieces and nephew "Karen Days" where we make memories together. I have been able to walk beside family members during difficult times in life.

Through the years, God has provided for my needs as a single person. He has given me a challenging career and a comfortable home. He has gifted me with wonderful friends who are always there for me. He has given me a church family. And most importantly, He has given me Himself. I know that He will continue to teach me about His call on my life. I believe that the real gift of my singleness is yet to be revealed. One day, in the courts of heaven, I will see His plan completely and be able to say, "Ah, now I understand why".

Thirdly, besides that being single is good and a gift from God – Paul has another message for singles. He makes it very clear that if you are not able to live a celibate, single life then you should get married. Verse 9 states it in what may be considered a "no-nonsense" way..."But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." Don't you love

that... straight to the point! He goes on in verses 36-38 to say, "If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing..." So basically only remain single if you are able to abstain from sex. Sex outside of marriage is sin and Paul is just making that clear once again here.

It seems that this chapter is mostly written to affirm God's perspective on singleness and not necessarily intended to affirm his perspective and even blessing on marriage but we can still have a lot of application here for those who are married...

First Paul tells those who are married to be faithful. He says in verse 2 that because of such immorality each married man should have one wife and each married woman should have one husband. He goes on in verse 10-11 to shun divorce. The immorality that Paul referred to in verse 2 is most likely the Temple of Aphrodite that acquired such wealth that it owned over one thousand female sex slaves. (NIV Study Bible note, 2002) Paul's insistence on faithfulness in marriage would have appeared unreasonable to those within the Corinthian church. Their culture was rampant with opportunities to have lovers on the side as well as a spouse (or two or three...). With our steady divorce rate and rising rates of infidelity we are not unlike the Corinthians but should recognize that God is grieved by divorce. There are biblical reasons for divorce however, that is not to say that that road is easy but sometimes necessary.

Secondly, if you are married you should be having sex. I apologize for the bluntness but there's really no reason to tip toe around it. Paul says in verse 4, "The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife." In Paul's culture this was a shocking statement to men... especially coming from a man. Men in the city of Corinth were wedded to their rights and considered it weak to yield their body to anyone. In our culture I don't think a man could ever get by with preaching a message on this because not only are men wedded to their rights but also women who will march, wear vulgar attire and speak obscenities in an effort to proclaim their rights over their bodies. I think we need to be reasonable individuals and look at this verse and realize God is a God of peace and love and would never condone abuse in anyway but rather knows that marriages thrive when both a husband and wife submit (compromise) to each other.

Paul states in verse 5 that there may be a time to abstain from sexual relations in marriage for the sake of an intense time of prayer but it should only be through mutual consent and for a short time. Basically Paul is saying in regards to sex - if you're single, don't act like you're married and if you're married, don't live like you're single! Don't deprive each other!

Another item he tells those who are married is in verse 12 - if you're spouse is an unbeliever stay married. Peter states this again in 1 Peter 3:1, "Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives." In a room this large, it's inevitable that these words pierce the hearts of many. Again, I feel like this is an issue that I cannot relate to or address. So I've asked another dear friend of mine to share about her experience with an unbelieving spouse. She is a small group leader here at WBS and a very godly woman. Her name is Sarah Dukek and I know she would be more than willing to counsel you if you need that. Here is what she told me about her situation...

*First some comments. Some people mistakenly twist this verse to mean if your spouse is not acting rightly, then they are not a "believer". Because, they claim, a "real believer" would not act in such a way. But Paul is very clear in the Greek. He means an actual unbeliever. Notice throughout the New Testament Paul chastises those he calls believers for sins such as pride, adultery, and causing divisions and strife. Yes, real believers can act badly. So let's be clear. An unbeliever is someone who does not profess belief in Christ and may be overtly hostile to Christian witness.*

*Second, what are the ways such a marriage can happen? I mention this because there is a lack of imagination on the part of some on how this can occur. Too often the only way people can imagine this happening, or preach on it, is a Christian marries a non-Christian. But no, there are three ways this can happen.*

- 1. Two non-Christians marry and one becomes a Christian*
- 2. A Christian marries a non-Christian*
- 3. Two Christians marry and one renounces their faith*

*My basic story: My husband renounced his faith walked the journey of life as an unbeliever, and I walked with him as a Christian. After about seven years, God in his grace brought my husband back to Himself and he believed again. No one is guaranteed the turning to God of the unbelievers they love. Even if they do not, God is faithful to us and we learn more how to love those who are lost and to learn more of the heart of God.*

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*If you have another family member who does not believe, there is at least a good chance you will have a Christian spouse who prays and grieves with you. But too often, for the Christian married to a non-Christian, they walk alone. The loneliness was hard. Some Christians don't know what to say so they avoid the topic altogether, a few only ask about that topic, as if it were the only part of the Christian's life, and some didn't know, as this is one of those things you don't walk around announcing. People are busy with their lives and few people really "get it". Thankfully God sent me a few believers of great wisdom and experience I could sometimes connect who encouraged and supported me.*

Getting up on Sundays and taking my family to church when my husband didn't and wouldn't come was hard. Many parts of our "Christian life" that are social are taken for granted. There were pieces of my life I performed as a Christian such as church attendance and service that were good and right, but were done at times for impure reasons (to look good, to just socialize, to fit in). I stopped caring what outfits I wore to church, because it isn't a fashion show. I stopped going to church to fit in, because as a spiritually single woman, I was no longer "fitting in" the way I hoped to. My motives turned towards the right reasons, to worship God and weekly remember his sacrifices for us, because it would have been simpler, in so many ways, to stay home. Who wants to always be the one to explain to many people, over many years, why their spouse isn't there? Who wants to struggle getting toddlers to church on time on a weekend?

One of the most difficult aspects was the strong burden of being a daily witness. If I got angry, lost my temper, lost my patience, or in some way did something not Christ-like, I was hard on myself. How could he believe if I was such a bad witness? Living with a spouse who is critical of Christianity causes you to pray for others also, and realize your actions, while they do not save a person, affect others, even the ones we think are small. As the spouse of a non-Christian, I heard all about the man my husband knew was a Christian in front of him in a line who lied about his child's age to get a discount. People are watching you, but without this fact in your daily consciousness, it is often too easy to justify our transgressions. The petty arguments Christians picked with each other, the abuses of power evident in a few Christians in the news, the arrogance of some people who claimed to be Christians, were a weekly ache. I began recognizing my hypocrisy, sin, and lack of actual love for others as a real problem.

But now, who is it who saves? "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8&9) It is not us who saves others, but God. God works through us despite our many faults and weaknesses. There is enormous pressure in such a marriage to try to be perfect. It is ok to be real. It is ok to fail at times. You do not need to be perfect. Even though I knew this, it was sometimes like living in a furnace. Sometimes even other Christians put this burden upon you by suggesting if you just did X, your spouse might come to Christ. I say to the dear woman in this situation, always remember not everyone believed Jesus either.

Berating a married Christian for marrying a non-Christian, as I heard one radio Bible teacher actually do, is like berating a paraplegic for the action they took that led to their condition. (Also see failure of imagination, paragraph 3-more than one way this situation occurs). You can bet they care about it far more than you do, and they are fully aware of their daily challenges, having thought about it from far more facets than you have. It no longer matters how the situation began, but it matters what they do now.

I was committed to my husband, whom I loved. He was and is one of the most honest people I have ever met. God was with me. Even in the tsunami of this trial, several years in, it was my surprise and joy to find after the great wave, the columns

*of faith remained, held by chains of prayer and God's grace. The rock may have been picked cleaner of its detritus, feeling bare and painful, but still God's truth remained. Whatever your storm is, God is stronger. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." (Isaiah 43:2)*

*I learned to pray. When you are dire straits, pray. Pray even when it is long and hard and nothing seems to be changing. The God who can move mountains can change people's hearts, and this is just as spectacular. Jesus said to always pray, and never give up (Luke 18:1) When you don't know what to pray, God will pray with us. He is with us in the furnace. I learned to memorize Scripture to help express prayers and fill in knowledge of the faith I professed. You cannot defend your faith if you don't know what it teaches.*

*I learned how to argue. I still fail at times, but I learned you will never gain any ground if you let yourself become very angry. It can be simpler to try to shut the person down rather than actually listen to them. Listening does not mean you agree. But to truly respond, you must listen, sift their statements for any grain of truth, give them credit for recognizing things that are true, and agree where you can. Sometimes it is said unbelievers "want to be their own god". This is true of us all when we turn from God, but at times this statement can evoke a twinge of pride that we are not so arrogant. This should not be used as a way to label the unbeliever and explain it to ourselves, while failing to listen to valid concerns and questions. "Always be ready to give an answer, but do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15)".*

*I think in many women, we secretly believe we are just a little bit better than our husbands spiritually and get impatient with all the faults we think they have, real or imagined. Early on, though, I decided my enemy was not my husband. Christians have an enemy, but it is not other people, no matter who they are. Too often we get hung up on what the lost do and not who the lost are. The lost are people that God loves. Jesus died for us because we were, every one of us here today, lost. Do we care for the lost like that? Do you know someone who does not know God you would die for? Not only that, but less dramatically, do you know and love an unbeliever to the point you are willing to bite your tongue, pray your heart out, show grace, and show up? The deepness and expanse of the love of God cannot be overstated. God loves the lost and does not will that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

*I knew Sarah before her husband renounced his faith. I watched her live out these verses to stay with her unbelieving husband – still respecting him while yet feeling as if she was on the opposing team. Then of course I've had the joy of seeing Sarah's husband come back to the Lord after 7 long years. As Sarah said not all stories may end like that but we are not responsible for the conclusion but rather the obedience in the Now!*

Lastly let's talk about the takeaways for everyone found in chapter 7.

1. It's ok to ask questions. We chide the Corinthians for many things but at least they were willing to seek out wise council for the questions they had. We all need someone in our life who we can ask the tough questions to – An individual who will not just tell us what we want to hear but will rather speak Truth!
2. Remember we are saved by grace alone! It seems that every culture wants to add on something to their salvation... something to make them "more" justified when in actuality we are justified by faith alone in grace alone. The Corinthians added on the need to be celibate in marriage. We may not consider that but may think that if we were baptized as infants, if we go to a particular church or if we even attend Bible study that we are loved more and saved more. We are counted as righteous not by our works but because of our faith in God who forgives sinners (Romans 4:5).
3. Singles are a blessing to the Church. We shouldn't make it our mission to marry them off... Sometimes even worse than the secular culture, I think the Church can almost ostracize singles or make them feel incomplete. They have much to offer and we need to recognize that by putting their gifts to good use!
4. Marriage is hard work. We are told in Proverbs 18:22 that he who finds a wife finds what is good and in Ephesians 5 Paul compares the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and the Church. But let's be realistic... Those of us who are married most likely are (and should be) limited in our ministry opportunities because our primary responsibilities are to those at home.

This does not mean that we cannot serve beyond our homes but I know I realized long ago that serving, feeding and clothing the least of these began at 2009 14<sup>th</sup> St. NE in Rochester, MN. Not nearly as glamorous as serving outside the home but obedience is how I show the Lord I love him! If you are single, you must be aware that being married is not always happily ever after but also those of us who are married have a responsibility to be real to those who are single and not paint our marriages as the answer to all of life's problems.

Lastly, I would like to have you hear one more testimony from one of our teaching team members. Since she has been such an incredible testimony to me as a godly wife (for over 60 years), I thought you might glean a lot from Lorie sharing about her joys and trials throughout her marriage... Please welcome Lorie Dahlstrom...

*This morning I would like to share with you a personal example of what Angie has taught from the Scriptures on marriage. Since I am the Senior on the Teaching Team and have been married the longest I've had the most experience!!*



*This past weekend on Feb 18 Bob and I celebrated our 56th anniversary! We have had a wonderful marriage all these many years. As the Scripture says we came together as one---physically, emotionally, and spiritually.*

*Shortly after we were married we went to a Billy Graham Crusade in Mpls. and rededicated our lives to Christ. We enjoyed the blessing of the Lord-- 3 children and later 7 grandchildren. We have always been active in the church in various avenues. Jesus was the center of our marriage and activities.*

*On our 50th Anniversary I made an acrostic to share with our children to share with them the foundation of our successful marriage.*

*Jesus---center of our marriage*

*Encouragement--enthusiasm  
Positive attitude--build one another up*

*Seek the Lord daily---Scripture and Prayer*

*Understanding one another---with love  
"Give and take"---plus forgiveness*

*Servant's heart---serve one another  
Give 150% expecting nothing in return*

*Shortly before our 50th in 2010 Bob was diagnosed with Parkinson's which is a degenerative nerve disease. We had many fears about the disease and how it would affect our lives. Thankfully the progression has been slow but there have been challenges. Bob has had some falls ---one in 2015 resulting in a broken pelvis and a hospital stay. Thankfully he made a complete recovery and we have since moved into a townhouse. He often has low pressure which makes him dizzy and can result in a fall.*

*With the progression of the PD I have had to learn how to do so many things that Bob always handled---the finances, the insurance, the bills, the car, driving and keeping it filled with gas, etc. Before, Bob was the leader in charge and now I have to handle everything. I have had to adjust my thinking and the losses in our lives. The life we had is gone and our life ahead in the future will be different than we planned, and our activities, and travel have been limited. We can no longer go to AZ for the winter like we did for 15 yrs. or take long car trips.*

*But today I want to share with you the faithfulness of God and the power of the Word in our lives. And the importance of building your marriage on the solid foundation of Christ. The last 6 months have been more challenging for a variety of reasons and I went through a very dry period spiritually---finding it difficult to have an "Attitude of Gratitude". I think the reality of the change in our lives---*

particularly mine, was setting in. Our roles were switched and I had to become the one in charge and the "caregiver."

The PD seemed to become more unpredictable and I found it frustrating not to be able to plan anything. The Lord is teaching me dependence on Him moment by moment. "Don't worry about what is up ahead---just keep your eyes on me and I will help you!" "Find something to thank Me for in the midst of your situation." Psalm 20:24. "Since the Lord is directing our steps, why try to understand everything along the way."

The Bible is filled with over 30,000 promises and Psalm 145:13b "The Lord is faithful to all his promises." Phil 4:13. "I can do all things thru Christ who strengthens me." Phil 4:19. "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus." These are promises I hang on to when we have a very unpredictable day and the plans for activities fall apart.

The Lord is also teaching me to be content and trust him in every situation. Phil 4:12 and Psalm 62:8. "Trust in him at all times---pour out your hearts to him---God is our refuge." Also to be thankful in everything---I Thess 5:16-18. "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Sometimes that is hard but it seems when you can be thankful ---in the situation, not for the situation---it releases your mind and lets God work. Another key verse for me---Romans 12:12. "Be joyful in hope, (Be) patient in affliction, and (Be) faithful in prayer." I call this my 3 "Be's"!!!

As I began to trust and be thankful in the unpredictable situations, the Lord gave me peace and helped me thru and then He often gave me a little surprise---that brought joy to my heart---because I knew it was just for me from Him---blessings to lift my spirits and show me His love and care in tangible ways!!! Also each of these experiences I add to my memory bank to "Remember" when the next difficulty arises.

In the Scriptures we are commanded over and over to "remember" the wonderful things the Lord does and share with others. Remembering helps keep us focused. I have a dear friend, Grace, in AZ whose husband has Alzheimer's and I asked her how she deals with that and she said, "I focus on the Lord, and what we still have, and be thankful!" It's walking by faith and not by sight, and resting in God's great love for you.

These last 6 months have shown me the importance of a strong faith and building your marriage on God's Word and His principles. This is what will sustain us when we meet the challenges of life. When we get married we promise to love each other "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, 'til death do us part." We never know when or what those challenges will be. I'm sure many of you can relate whether you are facing struggles in your marriage, a health issue, a financial issue, family problems, or the process of aging and the limiting of your activities.

*Whatever your situation --- trusting the Lord and seeking Him is the most important thing you can do. Find some key Scriptures that are meaningful to you--meditate on them ----even memorize them if you can so the Holy Spirit can bring them to your mind just when you need them.*

Knowing Scripture has been a lifesaver for me. I often wake in the night and worries fly around in my mind---but focusing on Scripture verses calms my heart and helps me go back to sleep. A recent devotional from "Jesus Calling" (pp 48) has inspired and encouraged me---"When anxiety attempts to wedge its way into your thoughts, remind yourself that I am your Shepherd. The bottom line is that I am taking care of you; therefore, you needn't be afraid of anything. Rather than trying to maintain control over your life, abandon yourself to My will."

God loves me with perfect love which drives out fear (1 John 4:18). I can rest in that love. I would encourage you to practice the 3 "P's" every day.

PRAISE --God for who he is and his faithfulness to you

PRAY ----for wisdom and strength to do his will

PERSEVERE---Hebrews 12:1-2. "...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of our faith." Phil 1:6. "...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."

**Women's Bible Study is a ministry of Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN 55902**

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