

December 13, 2009

**FAMILIES IN THE KINGDOM & KINGDOM FAMILIES (PT 2)**

**MATTHEW 15.10-12**

*In Jesus' test from the Pharisees and dealings with his disciples, the relationship of families to the kingdom of heaven is shown to be a renewal of creation; fundamentally the same and yet radically new. In 15.10-12 Jesus re-defines the family around himself and his kingdom so that the unmarried status is legitimized and given a special place within the kingdom family.*

Context: Disciples responding to Jesus' teaching on divorce. Say that if what he says is correct, then it is better not to marry.

Note how Jesus *didn't* respond: He didn't say that marriage is for everyone.

Jesus' answer is actually quite revolutionary. Biological family practically idolized in Jesus' day. Jesus teaches that the unmarried state ("eunuch") can be a positive vocation and certainly legitimate within the kingdom family.

Fulfillment: cf. Isa 56.3-5. Giving eunuchs a name that will not be cut off part of fulfillment of Abrahamic promise in Gen 12.1ff., not given to those who cannot have biological children. Place for both married and unmarried in the kingdom.

Eunuchs: literal = those who are physically unable to have relations with a woman and, thus unable to have children. They have been born with some physical deformity or have experienced castration.

May not involve physical inability. E.g. eunuchs "made by men" may apply to those for whom the opportunity for marriage has not presented itself for one reason or another.

"Eunuch for the sake of the kingdom" may mean simply that a person has chosen a life of celibacy to dedicate himself to a specific aspect of the ministry of Christ's church. Cf. Paul in 1Cor 7.

Eunuchs in Esther. They gave up their privilege of having a bride (whether or voluntarily or involuntarily) in order to serve and glorify the king's bride. Those dedicated to the unmarried state for the sake of the kingdom are like these eunuchs.

**1. Singleness is a gift.**

"... those to whom it is *given*." 1Cor 7.7 Paul speaks about singleness in the context of a "gift" (*charisma*, same as chs 12 & 14).

2 interrelated perspectives: (1) this is a gift given to the individual. He is the one who lives in this state and has this particular calling upon his life. (2) This person is a gift to the church. It is a calling and ability that is good for the edification or the building up of the body of Christ. Therefore, it should not be despised or be treated as some second-class calling.

Who has this gift and how does one know when he has this gift? In one sense, anyone who is not married has the gift of singleness. The circumstance is one that is *given* to you by God and is not to be despised or handled lightly.

Each of us is called to celibacy outside of marriage. Each of us has a special, positive kingdom vocation outside of marriage at whatever time of life we may be single. The gift is determined by your present circumstances. May change over the years.

The circumstances in which God puts us are God's gracious gift to us that must be accepted and in which we must learn contentment. Cannot live always thinking about what we *don't* have.

Not based solely on desire for singleness or to be married. (Is it lawful to leave a marriage when you become unhappy with it?)

Difficulties handling the gift don't determine the gift. Gifts are also responsibilities that are sometimes difficult work.

**2. The unmarried state is not to be preferred over marriage and neither is marriage to be preferred over the unmarried state.**

Neither marriage or single is a "higher calling" in Christ's kingdom. Neither one is a 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizen. They are different callings, but one is not to be preferred over the other.

Unmarried cannot be 2<sup>nd</sup> class. If so, then the resurrection will be a demotion (cf. Mt 22).

Marriage is not simply a capitulation to base desires. God instituted and joins husbands and wives together (Mt 15.3-9).

Marriage: a) images the ultimate marriage of Christ & his bride; b) reminds us that God has not abandoned his original creation plan. Challenges of: (cf. 1Cor 7) limited in what can be done; marriage creates some complications

Singleness: a) reminds the church that the biological family is not ultimate but the family of Christ; b) frees you up from marital anxieties so that chances can be taken that otherwise you couldn't take; c) reminds the church that ultimately we will all only be married to Christ after the resurrection (cf. Mt 22). Challenges: a) sexual temptations; b) loneliness

Neither calling will solve all your problems. There are benefits and challenges to each.

### **3. The unmarried are a part of *the* family.**

Unmarried should not mean a call to be solitaire. Unmarried Christians are a part of the family of Christ. The church should act like a family in this regard.

This means also that the married must make a conscious effort to include them and treat them like family members.

Does **not** necessarily mean, "Start a singles ministry." Shouldn't necessarily isolate them according to marriage status. Isolating ourselves from one another relating only to those in our peer groups (e.g. socially, economically, generationally, etc.) contributes to the problem and the stigmas we place on the unmarried state.

The unmarried and the married should be integrated with the rest of us as much as possible and given opportunities of relationships so that those relational needs can be met to some degree.

What the married have to offer the unmarried: a) possible help for preparation for marriage; and/or b) relationships so that they don't feel isolated but part of the family.

What the unmarried have to offer the married: a) time and ability to help them; and b) an awareness of looking outside of their own biological families.

### **4. The unmarried state witnesses against the idolization of the family.**

Marriage and the family are good gifts given to us by God. But the family is not absolute and is certainly not to be idolized. What we call the biological family is not absolute. The family characterized by faith has always taken precedence.

While we have certain responsibilities to our families that demand much of our time and energy, we must not crawl into the bunker we call our family and shut out the rest of our true family.

The presence of the unmarried around us should be a constant reminder that our ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction cannot be found in our marriages and in our biological children just b/c they are our children.

### **5. The unmarried state witnesses against the contemporary idea of singleness as freedom from responsibility.**

Freedom ≠ a license to be self-indulgent. Singleness is a legitimate calling and position in the kingdom, but some older singles remain unmarried b/c they refuse to grow up. They don't want any responsibility, so they shun marriage.

You must recognize your singleness as a particular calling and, therefore, responsibility. Not just free from something but free to do things you would not otherwise be able to do were you married.

You are married to Christ and have responsibility to him. Involves chastity but also much more. How are you using your time for the sake of the kingdom?

Accept the circumstances in which God has you in your present life and think about what you are able to do instead of what you are not able to do. You are a gift to Christ's church. You have time and abilities that are needed somehow and somewhere in the body.

A few questions:

- How much do we treat the church like the family?
- To the unmarried: How am I throwing myself into the family-life of the church?
- Is our church a place where the unmarried can find a home?