

What Should I Do?  
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We're studying this morning in 1 Corinthians 7

Opening Discussion: Think of a couple you know who you believe has not only many years of marriage but a HEALTHY marriage. What do you observe as some of the ingredients in their HEALTHY marriage?

- Should I get married or stay single?
- If I am married, should I stay married?
- What if a believer is married to an unbeliever, then what?
- What does it mean to be called to be single?
- And what is the role of sex in all of this?
- Bottom line: What is God's plan for my life regarding MARRIAGE.
  
- The people of the church at Corinth had questions...and Paul had answers.
  
- For the first six chapters of this book...Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth...Paul had addressed problems he had heard about in the church:
- A lack of UNITY among the people
- The fact that they needed to RESPECT and ENCOURAGE their leaders in the church
- And as we studied last week, REASONS for living out CHRISTIAN MORALITY
- Now in VERSE 1 of Chapter 7, he transitions to what appears to be a list of questions they had for him...the first topic is MARRIAGE
  
- We've all seen the statistics on marriage and divorce:

The Statistics:

- Most Americans get married at some point in their life: just one out of five adults (22%)
- has never been married.
- Among those who have said their wedding vows, one out of three have been divorced at least once, according to a study from The Barna Group.
- Barna's study revealed that an even higher proportion of born again Christians (84%) tie the knot.
- Marriage Is the Norm
- The most TROUBLING statistic is that while about 1/3 of the US population divorces; Evangelical Christians rank about the same as the rest of the population.
- [http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released)
- [statistics-released](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released)

George Barna:

*"There no longer seems to be much of a stigma attached to divorce; it is now seen as an unavoidable rite of passage," He continues: "There is also evidence that many young people are moving toward embracing the idea of serial marriage, in which a person gets married two or three times, seeking a different partner for each phase of their adult life."*

- Those are the stats...what does scripture say? The short version:
- Most people SHOULD get married, and ideally people who are married should not divorce.
- But as the statistics show, unfortunately divorce is a reality and the church is not immune

1 Corinthians 7:1-9 (NIV)

Marriage

1Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.[a] 2But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 3The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6I say this as a concession, not as a command. 7I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

8Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. 9But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

- In these first few verses of Chapter 7, it's important to remember that Corinth at that time was much like our society today...it was a **SEXUALLY SATURATED SOCIETY**
- As we learned last week,
- It appears that these early Christians might have asked the question: "Is celibacy [remaining unmarried and therefore celibate] more spiritual than marriage?"
- Verse 1: Paul says "It is good for a man not to marry." In other words, it's good for a man or woman to be celibate if they have been given the **GIFT** of celibacy.
- If we look down to Verse 7 we see Paul indicate that he (at least at this time) was not married: "I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God."
- It's believed that Paul had been married at one time, however, the scripture is silent on whether he had a wife who died or who left him when he was converted.
- So Paul says, if you have the **GIFT OF SINGLENES** and can be **CELIBATE**...it's good...however, Paul knew human nature...

- Verse 2: Paul says rather than be SINGLE and tempted to live a sexually immoral lifestyle, it's better to have a spouse
- Then in the next few verses he comments on the role of SEX in marriage
- Without going into great discussion on this here's the summary
- Husbands and wives should be sensitive to the physical needs of the other spouse
- They should not withhold intimacy from the other (except when they both agree to do so for a time...for example for a season of prayer and fasting)
- Paul writes that the spouse's body is not only theirs but belongs also to their mate
- This is the point where all the ladies are thinking: "It's obvious a MAN WROTE THAT PART!"
- I'm just the messenger ladies!
- All kidding aside, it's clear that Paul is addressing a reality of how we are wired
- The second half of Verse 5 he writes: "Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

Warren Wiersbe's commentary says:

"Sexual love is a beautiful tool to build with, not a weapon to fight with. To refuse each other is...to invite Satan to tempt the partners to seek their satisfaction elsewhere."

- Now before some of you go home and take this out of context and say to your spouse: 'You heard what Paul wrote...we belong to each other...don't withhold from each other.'
- Before you write your own Bible commentary for these verses...

Wiersbe goes on to say:

*"As in all things, the spiritual must govern the physical; for our bodies are God's temples...Paul is encouraging Christian partners to be 'in tune' with each other in matters both spiritual and physical."*

- There are many great Biblical resources on this part of the marriage relationship that cover it in much greater detail than we can get into in the scope of this lesson
- Verses 8 and 9: Paul says to the unmarried and widows... "It's good for them to say unmarried" (like Paul) "But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry." "Better to marry than to burn with passion."
- So back to the question: Should I be married or single? It depends on how God has wired you...for most people MARRIAGE is the right answer...but some have the GIFT of SINGLENES and Biblically that means CELIBACY
- What about those who are already married?
- Should they STAY married?
- If they separate then what?

1 Corinthians 7:10-11 (NIV)

10 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

- Verse 10: Paul says ‘this is not ME speaking but the Lord’ when I say: STAY TOGETHER
- God designed marriage:

Genesis 2:24

24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

- Jesus reinforced this:

Mark 10:6-8

6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' [a] 7 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, [b] 8 and the two will become one flesh. [c] So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

- Did Jesus make any exceptions?
- Matthew 19:9 “except for marital unfaithfulness”
- Paul points out another exception when divorce is warranted:
- Verse 15 of this chapter: “15 But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.
- But we’re getting ahead of ourselves...
- It’s clear from scripture that God hates divorce

Malachi 2:15-16a

15 Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. [a] So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel,

- That doesn’t mean that some good Christians haven’t had to experience divorce
- But scripture shows God wants those who marry to work hard to stay together
- Here’s the bottom line on divorce:
- Divorce happens among Christians and in some circumstances may be the last option for peace
- But Jesus taught a “high view” of marriage and Paul reiterated what Jesus said

- Married Christians need to do all we can to **STAY MARRIED** and to **STRENGTHEN** our marriages.
- But what if my spouse is not a believer and I AM?

1 Corinthians 7:12-16 (NIV)

12To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. 14For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

15But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. 16How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

- In this section Paul says the **OPPOSITE** of what he said earlier... ‘This is **ME** speaking because Jesus didn’t address this.’
- It’s apparent that in the early church as people became Christians, they had spouses who were **NOT** yet Christians
- So they wondered: “Does this mean I should get out of this marriage to an unbeliever?”
- Paul says **NO**. The Christian spouse should **NOT** initiate divorce...but should **TRY** to make it work.
- Why? Look at verse 14: If we are familiar with the term **SANCTIFIED** (set apart) we know that is the work of the Holy Spirit not husbands and wives.
- Question: What does Paul mean by that verse when he says the spouses **SANCTIFY** each other?

John MacArthur writes:

*“This does not mean salvation...One Christian in a marriage brings grace that spills over on the (unbelieving) spouse --- even possibly leading them to salvation.”*

- Paul addressed the children of this kind of marriage and says they would become unclean. Wonder what that means?
- Look at it this way, if the fact that you became a Christian and your spouse didn’t could **ANNUL** the marriage...then the children would be **ILLEGITIMATE**
- What Paul is saying is that becoming a Christian doesn’t change your status in the marriage...the marriage is still valid.
- Another take on the statement about the children is that the **BELIEVING SPOUSE** has the opportunity to **INFLUENCE** and **WITNESS** to those children by staying and making it work. Otherwise, the children might never come to Christ.

- An exception though, in Verse 15 as we said: If the unsaved spouse walks out...let them go.
- Can that spouse remarry?

John MacArthur again:

*“The bond of marriage is broken only by death (Romans 7:2); adultery (Matthew 19:9); or an unbeliever’s leaving. When the bond is broken in any of those ways, a Christian is free to marry another believer...”*

- What about STAYING SINGLE?

1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (NIV)

32I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. 33But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife— 34and 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. 35I 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.

- Some people are given the GIFT OF SINGLENESS and therefore the GIFT OF CELIBACY
- Question: What does Paul say in these verses about how our ATTENTION and TIME are divided when we are married? The married person IS RIGHTFULLY and APPROPRIATELY concerned about their spouse and family. The single person doesn't have that distraction.
- Question: So, does that mean it's more HOLY to be SINGLE and CELIBATE?
- No. He addressed that earlier in the chapter. It's all about God's calling.
- Focus on the Family has a great website called boundless.org with resources on this subject of the call of SINGLENESS.

Here's the link to some good articles:

<http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0000318.cfm>

<http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001199.cfm> (more links at bottom of the page on this link)

<http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0000680.cfm>

Quoting one of them...

*All Christians are called to love God with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love their neighbors as themselves. However, God calls some Christians to serve him in the married state, others to serve him in the state of sexually abstinent singleness. If God wants you to be single, He will also provides the spiritual gifts which make it possible. Notice that I didn't say "which make it easy"! Paul remarks that if you are attempting to remain single but find that you cannot bear the burden, it is not a sin to marry. Better to switch to the other way of life God honors than to be aflame with lust.*

- To marry or not to marry?

### 1 Corinthians 7:36-39 (NIV)

36If anyone thinks he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. 37But 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. 38So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.[a]

39A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

- When should someone marry?
- There is a debate about Verse 36:
- Some translations say he's talking about a man who is engaged to a young virgin and they are struggling with sexual temptation before marriage
- Others say it's about a father's concern about his virgin daughter who is getting older...remember in that culture the parents typically ARRANGED the marriage...should the father encourage his virgin daughter to tie the knot?
- Either way the answer is the same: Some of you should get married and some of you are gifted to SINGLENESS...it's all about discovering what GOD WANTS you to do in your life.
- In other words, don't let other PUSH you into MARRIAGE or CELIBACY...do what GOD is calling you to do!
- And finally in verses 39 and 40, a word to WIDOWS
- If you're husband dies or your wife dies, you are free to marry.
- But Paul says if you're like he was, (or like my two grandmothers; or like my wife says she will be) it's better to stay as you are.

### What's The Takeaway?

- If we are married, we are to do all we can to stay married.
- A Christian who stays married to an unbeliever can have a positive influence on and witness to the children and the spouse.
- Christians who are single are to consider whether God's plan for them is to remain so.
- If we are single and do not have the gift of celibacy, we are free to get married.