

## WHY MARRY?

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

**Read:** Ephesians 5:22-33

1. Single vs Married
  - It's good not to marry
  - BUT ...
  - The gift of singleness
2. Guidelines for marriage
  - Mutual obligation
  - Mutual ownership
  - Mutual consent

**And so:** *Help each other live holy lives.*

### 1 Co 7:1-7 rev

Dear Congregation

Surely it must be good not to marry. After all Jesus never married. Paul wasn't married. With precedents like that, it must be good to stay single. Some would even say that it must even be the more spiritual way.

And as Paul says, it is good to stay single, BUT ... . And the BUT here is so big that when you get to the end of the passage you wonder how many people should actually stay single after all. It's good for a gifted few to stay single, but for most of us it's much better to marry.

### Point 1

After reading verse 1 here, you could even start to wonder if Australians today are quite Christian after all - a lot of people nowadays agree that *it's good not to marry*. And so people put off getting married for as long as they can. They might even have a partner. Maybe the partner would even desperately like to get married. But they put off getting married until they're 30, 35, 40. They're having too much fun single. They like the freedom. They don't want to be tied down. They don't want the responsibility of marriage, and then maybe kids. They think life's too good not being married.

And for that matter, plenty of people over the centuries have thought it good not to marry too, for different reasons. There have always been people who have admired the sheer self-discipline it takes to do without the pleasures and comforts of life. We call them ascetics. They live on the bare necessities – like

bread and water. They might live in caves, or on top of poles. They fast. They're celibate. John the Baptist was an ascetic – living on locusts and honey in the desert. The monks in their monasteries were often ascetics.

And apparently some of the folk in Corinth took that approach too. They didn't want to indulge their desires and appetites too much. Maybe even in reaction to what they saw some of the other Corinthian Christians getting up to, like the immoral brother in chapter 5, or like the men sleeping with prostitutes in chapter 6.

And you see here that Paul agrees. It's good not to marry ... BUT - BUT since there is so much immorality, *everyone should marry*.

Because of the kinds of problems the Corinthian Christians were having with immorality, as a general rule all of them should marry. They were having enough trouble living God's holy way without putting themselves under even more pressure. Better that they simply got married, enjoyed married life with their spouse, and were able to live a holy, Christlike life, than that they tried to be more 'spiritual' as they saw it, stayed single, and regularly fell into sexual sin.

And after all, marriage is the normal pattern of things God has given us. If you go back to Genesis 2, just after God makes Eve out of Adam's rib, Genesis says, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.'

And the passage we read in Ephesians builds on that. It isn't more spiritual to stay single. Singleness can have its advantages, but so does marriage.

The pattern in Genesis 2 for marriage should be our general rule, not staying single. In fact, you might know that one of the first things many of the Reformers did after their ties with the Roman Catholic Church were cut was get married.

And we need to keep this in mind as well. Our society needs to hear this.

After all, as a general rule Australians today are maturing younger, but getting married later. And they're often putting off marriage for all the wrong reasons.

But at the same time our society isn't a whole lot better than the Corinth of Paul's day. The pressure is on already for teenagers to be sexually active. People think there's something wrong with you if you aren't. You see it on the TV all the time. Apparently there's no hope of making it into the house on Big Brother if you make it clear you have moral principles. It used to be the same with the show The Bachelor – a girl had no chance of winning if she let the bachelor know that the only man she was going to sleep with was her husband. The world we live in is simply geared against you if you're planning to say 'no' until you're married.

God's advice to us in all of this is don't put off marriage for the wrong reasons.

And yet there is one exception. And it's there right at the end of this passage – some people have *the gift to stay single*. Jesus had that gift. He was able to stay single and not constantly find himself falling into sin because of it. Paul had that gift. And as he says, 'I wish all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God, [some this one, some another].' And not many people have the gift to stay single. In fact, if you've ever done the "Discover your gifts" course, you'll probably remember that it doesn't even rate a mention.

Actually, Paul probably spoke from experience on both sides of the fence. He probably had been married once. In his day it was simply expected that Jewish men were married by the age of 20. Maybe his wife had died. Maybe she had left him when he became a Christian. We don't know. But there is a good chance that he was married before discovering later in life that he had the gift to stay single.

And there are advantages in staying single. Verses 32 to 35 in this chapter give one of them - 'an unmarried [person] is concerned about the Lord's affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married [person] is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are

divided.’ You see in the Bible how Jesus and Paul and others made good use of that advantage.

And no doubt there are other advantages as well. And so, again, it is good not to marry. It is good to stay single. BUT for the majority of us who don’t have this gift, marriage is better.

How would you even know if you had this gift? And it seems to me that maybe asking the question from the other angle is easier. How would you know if you didn’t have this gift? And if, in our singleness, we find ourselves constantly tempted to the point of struggling to control ourselves, or if we regularly find ourselves falling into sexual sin, then I think we can safely say that we definitely don’t have the gift. On the other hand, if we don’t find ourselves struggling like that, then maybe we do.

## **Point 2**

Then, for the majority of us, who don’t have this gift of singleness, there’s also guidelines here for *how to conduct ourselves in marriage*. And you see that they involve mutual obligations, mutual ownership, and mutual consent.

*Mutual obligations* means that the emphasis is on responsibility, not rights – it’s on giving, not getting. Marriage isn’t about getting from my partner the things I want - it’s about being there for them, helping them fulfill their needs and desires. Marriage is about giving ourselves to another, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part. Marriage is about submitting to the other in love and respect, sacrificially giving ourselves to them. And you can imagine that if only one of the partners takes that attitude and the other one is out for themselves, this approach doesn’t work terribly well, but if both partners take this approach, it works really well.

In fact the Greek word used here is usually used for debts, taxes, and things like that. A debt is something you owe another person. A tax is something you owe the government. It isn’t cleared until it’s paid. And tax here is a good example, because it’s an ongoing debt. Your debt to the government isn’t cleared with one payment. With each new income you owe a proportion to the government. It’s an ongoing debt that’s

paid in an ongoing way.

And marriage is the same. We have this ongoing debt to our spouse. Paul is especially thinking here of sexual gratification, but we could extend that to other things as well, like love, and care, companionship, faithfulness, devotion, encouragement, and other things like that. If we're married, we simply owe these things to our husband, to our wife.

The best example God has given us in this regard is Jesus' love for the church and the church's submission to him. Ephesians 5 says that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church, and wives should submit to and respect their husbands in the same way that the church submits to Christ.

One person writes,

“WE OFTEN HEAR.... of the 'other man' or the 'other woman'. Actually there would be no room for the other man or the other woman if the husband and wife simply kept their priorities in order and continued to court each other throughout their marriage. In short, our divorce rate would drop dramatically if men and women 'delivered' in marriage what they 'sold' while courting. [For example men] "When should you tell your wife you love her?" ... "Before somebody else!"”

***Then the second principle here for marriage is mutual ownership.*** The wife's body doesn't belong to her alone but also to her husband - the husband's body doesn't belong to him alone but also to his wife.

And again, the example God gives us is Jesus willingly sacrificing himself for us, offering his body on the cross for us, giving up his life for us. And us in return offering our bodies to him as living sacrifices, offering ourselves to him in lives of love and service. 1 Co 6 says that our 'body [is] meant ... for the Lord, and the Lord for the body'.

And this idea of mutual ownership between husband and wife is the basis for the idea of mutual obligation to each other that we've just looked at. If the husband's body doesn't just belong to him but

also to his wife, then she does have a certain right to it – if the wife’s body doesn’t just belong to her but also to her husband, then he has a certain right to it as well. Each one should be given ready access to the other.

But then how do we make that work in practice from day to day? Sometimes one of us is just too tired for any bedroom activity at the end of a long hard day - all we want when we finally get to bed is a good night sleep. On the other hand, maybe the other one has been looking forward to some attention for days. Or maybe one of us just doesn’t feel well - has a headache – they wouldn’t mind a hot chocolate and a cuddle but nothing more physical than that. How do you work these things out in practice?

*And that’s where the last principle comes in - mutual consent.* We talk about it together. We let love and concern for each other be our guide. And we decide on the final outcome together.

And the principle to use when depriving each other begins to extend well beyond our normal practice, is that the only thing that’s important enough to warrant that is time spent with God. If we’re not finding time during a frantically busy patch in our lives to spend some unhurried, quiet time with God, then we might have good reason to spend that time in prayer rather than spend it with our spouse. But otherwise we shouldn’t deprive each other for exceptionally long periods of time. If we do, we’re only asking for trouble. The Corinthians obviously had a problem with self-control in this area of life, especially in the society they lived in. But many of us are probably much the same. And we can help our spouse live a holy life by practicing mutual obligations to each other, mutual ownership of each other’s bodies, and only depriving each other by mutual consent.

## **Conc**

And so, even though the Bible presents marriage as instituted by God in Ge 2, and even though it presents it as a reflection of Christ’s relationship with the church in Eph 5, Paul can still be very practical and down to earth as well when it comes to marriage. Marriage is also a part of God’s answer for us when it

comes to living a Christlike life in an immoral society. Marriage is the context God has given us to throw off our inhibitions together, let go, and simply enjoy each other's sexuality.

And so, even though there are probably some of us with the gift of remaining single, most of us should expect to marry. In light of the way God has made us, and in light of the world we live in, it is good not to marry, BUT, for most of us getting married is far, far, better.