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To Marry or Not to Marry
7: 1-9

To marry or not to marry DIG: What were the circumstances in Corinth at the time Paul wrote? Why are those circumstances so important to understanding almost everything that he wrote in this chapter? What did Paul advise for unmarried believers? Why should married couples maintain a sexual relationship? What does the issue of celibacy especially impact the contemporary Messianic community? What are the advantages of remaining single?

REFLECT: Have you seen baby believers (perhaps yourself at one time) make crazy changes in their lives based on their new-found "freedom" in Messiah? What problems can that cause, which could have been avoided by applying Paul's principles here? When is pursuing a change in circumstances appropriate? How do you view single people? With compassion? With sympathy? With disappointment? With awe? What gift has ADONAI given to you?

Apparently believers in Corinth asked if celibacy within marriage was appropriate.



As with **their** many other problems, much of **their** marital trouble in the church at **Corinth** reflected the pagan and morally corrupt society in which they lived. As has

been said many times, the problem wasn't that the church was in **Corinth**, the problem was that **Corinth** was in the church. **Their** society tolerated **sex** outside of **marriage**, adultery, homosexuality and polygamy. Nevertheless, **ADONAI** saved a number of **Corinthian**s out of that lifestyle of **sexual** impurity. Sadly, some had dragged **their** past **sins** into the church.

Celibacy is good (7:1): Now to deal with the questions you wrote about: "Is it good for a man not to touch a woman (7:1 NASB)?" To touch a woman was a common Jewish euphemism for **sexual** intercourse. The phrase is used in that sense in passages such as **Genesis 20:6**; **Ruth 2:9** and **Proverbs 6:28-29**. In other words, **Paul** was saying, "It is a good thing for believers to be **single** and not **married**." **He** does not say, however, that **singleness** is the only **good** condition, or that **marriage** is in any way wrong or inferior to **singleness**. **He** says only that **singleness**, as long as it is **celibate**, can be **good**.

ADONAI Himself declared at creation that **it isn't good for the man to be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him (Genesis 2:18).** Everyone needs companionship and **God** ordained **marriage** to be, among other things, the most fulfilling and common means of companionship. **YHVH** allowed for **singleness** and did not require **marriage** for everyone in the Dispensation of Torah; however, Jewish tradition not only looked on **marriage** as the ideal state, but looked on **singleness** as disobedience of **the LORD's** command to **be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28 NASB).**

It is possible that, as a result of this, some of the Jewish believers in **Corinth** were pressuring single Gentile believers to become **married**. Some of the Gentiles, on the other hand, perhaps because of past experiences they had had, were inclined to remain **single**. As the Jews had done with **marriage**, those Gentiles, reacting to the **sexual** nature of their past, come to look on **celibacy** not only as the ideal state but the only truly godly state as well. **Paul** acknowledges that **singleness** is **good** and honorable. But **he** does not support the claim that it is a *more* spiritual state, or that it is more acceptable to **God** than **marriage**.[179]

Celibacy is tempting (7:2): Well, because of the danger of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband (7:2). This did not mean that every **Corinthian** believer was **immoral**, although many of them were. **Paul** was speaking of **the danger of sexual immorality** for those who were **single**. **Sexual** temptation goes beyond physical desire; there is a spiritual component to it. **Satan** understands how powerful the

urge to impurity can be, and **he** exploits it as a human weakness.[180] Because of the **immoral** society in which they lived, where **sexual** liberty was feely practiced and glorified, it would be a great temptation for **single** believers, as it is today.

However, **marriage** cannot simply be reduced as **God's** escape valve for sex drive. **Paul** does not suggest that believers should go out and find another believer to **marry** only to keep from getting into moral **sin**. **He** had a much higher view of **marriage** than that **(Ephesians 5:22-23). His** purpose here was to stress the reality of the **sexual** temptations of **singleness** and to acknowledge that they had a legitimate outlet in **marriage**. Although **celibacy** is **good**, it's not superior to **marriage**, and **it** has dangers and temptations that **marriage** doesn't have.[181]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Marriage is often thought of as The place to find **love**, but **Your love** for **Your children** is the best. **See how glorious a love the Father has given us, that we should be called God's children – and so we are (First John 3:1)!** How awesome that **Your** perfect **love** is always with **Your children**. **For God Himself has** said: **I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).** It is so wonderful to know that when we run to **You** for help – **You** know all about the situation before we say a word about it, and **You** are mighty to work it all out**. You are familiar with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, ADONAI, You know all about it (Psalms 139:3b-4).** Praise **You** for **Your** great love that surpasses knowledge. **May You have strength to grasp with all the kedoshim what is the width and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Messiah which surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:18-19).***

*Everyone longs for deep **love** and often looks to marriage to find **love**, but it is **Your love** that is so deep and long-lasting. **For your Maker is your husband – ADONAI-Tzva'ot is His Name -the Holy One of Isra'el is your Redeemer. He will be called God of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5).** How wonderful that **Your love** is not a long distance away, but **You** live within all who **love You**.*
***Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:23).** No matter how good the earthly **marriage** is – **Your love** is so much better and deeper and richer than any human **marriage** ever could be. Thank **You** for **Your** wonderful eternal **love**! In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

Celibacy is wrong for people who are married (7:3-5): Evidently, some of **the**

Corinthians were practicing **celibacy** within their **marriage** and had asked if it was appropriate, to which **Paul** responded with an emphatic, "No! **Celibacy** is not more spiritual than **marriage**." Extremes spawn extremes, so where extreme excess flourishes, one often finds extreme self-denial as a reaction. **Paul** warned **his** readers that **the husband should give his wife what she is entitled to in the marriage relationship, and the wife should do the same for her husband (7:3). Paul** made it clear that physical relations within **marriage** are not simply a privilege and a pleasure, but a responsibility. **Husbands** and **wives** have a duty to give **sexual** satisfaction to each other, lest **the Adversary** take advantage of **their** human weakness. There is no distinction between **men** and **women**. **The husband** has no more rights in this regard than **the wife**.

Then **Paul** reinforces the mutuality of the obligation. **The wife is not in charge of her own body, but her husband is; likewise, the husband is not in charge of his own body, but his wife is.** One aspect of selfless **love** that makes for a good **marriage** involves one **marriage** partner giving more of **himself** or **herself sexually** to **his** or **her** mate in recognition of, and with a desire to meet, those needs. When a **husband** or **wife** willingly deprives **his** or **her** spouse of having that need met, **he** or **she** opens the other up to satanic temptation. Thus: **Do not deprive each other, except for a limited time, by mutual agreement, and then only so as to have extra time for prayer; but afterwards, come together again. Otherwise, because of your lack of self-control, you may succumb to the Adversary's temptation (7:4-5).**[182] The length of **time** for physical separation and the specific need and purpose of the **prayer** should be agreed on in advance.

Celibacy is a gift (7:6-7): Commenting on what **he** had just said, **Paul** continues: **I am giving you this as a suggestion** (Greek: *sungnome*, meaning *to think the same as someone, to have a joint opinion, a common mind or understanding*)**, not as a command (7:6). This** refers back to what he had been saying up to this point. **Paul** was aware of the **goodness** of being **single** and **celibate**, yet also aware of the privileges and responsibilities of **marriage**. **His** comments were not meant as **a command** for every believer to be **married**. **Marriage** was instituted by **God** and is the norm for **man-woman** relationships, and it is a great blessing to mankind. But it is not required for believers or for anyone else. **His** point was, and is: If you are **single** that is **good**, and if you are **married** or get **married**, stay **married** and retain normal **marital** relations, for that is for **God**. Spirituality is **not** determined by **marital** status.[183]

Actually, I wish everyone were like me (7:7a). It's as if **Paul** was saying, "**I wish** that **everyone** were as little distracted by wayward **sexual** impulses as **I** am. Then **they** would have **self-control** and would be able to devote **themselves** fully to **the Lord's** work with undivided attention. However, I realize that such a tendency cannot be willed into being, but is **a gift from God,** which is not given to **everyone**.[184]

This chapter makes it clear that **Paul** was **not married** at the time he wrote this letter, but we know that **he** had been **married** at some point **(8:7)**. **Jewish men were required to be married and bear children (Mishnah, Yevamot 6:6).** Within the Jewish theological tradition, it can be easily seen how **celibacy** was greatly frowned upon. **Rabbi Eleazar said, "Any man who has no wife is not a proper man" (Talmud, Yevamot 63a), while Raba Ishmael taught that God watches a man to see when he will marry; then "As soon as one attains twenty and has not married, He exclaims, "Blasted be his bones" (Talmud, Kiddushin 29b).**

But those who have not received the gift of **singleness** should not try to remain **unmarried**. **Each has his own gift from God, one this, another that (7:7b).** Our purpose should be to discover the gifts that **ADONAI** has given us and to use those **gifts** faithfully and joyfully in **His** service, without either envying or finding fault with **the gifts** we do not have. Celibacy, just as much as **marriage**, is a gift from **God**.[185]

Celibacy among contemporary Messianic congregations: On the whole, today's Messianic people – with various roots in both Judaism and evangelical Protestant Christianity – do not know what to do with the large number of young **men** and **women** in **their** twenties, thirties, and forties, who are **unmarried**, often for legitimate reasons beyond their control. Many, for whatever reason, will either subconsciously or even consciously, mix spiritual maturity and marital status in their minds – meaning that the ideal spiritual setting for someone is being **married** with several children. When a young **man** or **woman** approaches **his** or **her** late twenties **unmarried**, then it is often thought that such an individual is probably spiritually deficient, and likely also selfish and self-serving.

In a small faith community such as the Messianic movement, we should recognize that with our size being what it is, that it will be difficult for many young **men** and **women** to find a suitable spouse – at least for an extended season. Rather than shunning such people as being spiritually immature or unfit for service within the

Kingdom of **God**, a review of the legitimate and blessed biblical option of **celibacy**, should be in order.[186]

Celibacy is not for everyone (7:8-9): Apparently, some of **the Corinthians** who had been **married** and divorced before being saved were asking if **they** could remarry. No doubt this was a key question in the **Corinthian** church. **Paul's** response here is uniquely crafted for those who wanted to know **their** options. **Now to the single people** (Greek: *agamos*, meaning *married with a negative prefix a*) **and the widows** (Greek: *chera*) **I say that it is fine if they remain unmarried like me (7:8).** By that statement **Paul** affirms that **he** had formerly been **married** because **marriage** was required for membership in the Great Sanhedrin **(Acts 26:10)**. **He** was probably a widower. The point is that those who were **single** when saved should know that it was good for **them** to stay that way. There was no need to rush into **marriage**.

One of the most beautiful stories associated with **Yeshua's** birth and infancy is that of **Anna** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Au – Jesus Presented in the Temple**). When Joseph and Mary brought the baby **Yeshua** to the Temple to present **Him** to **ADONAI** and to offer a sacrifice, the prophetess **Anna** recognized **Yeshua** as the **Messiah**. Much as Simeon had done a short while before. **Her husband** had **lived only seven years** after **their marriage**, and **she** had remained **a widow** ever since. At the age of **84 she** was still faithfully **serving Ha'Shem night and day** in **His Temple**. **She** did not look on **her** lot in life as inferior and certainly not as meaningless. **She** had **the gift** of **singleness** and used it joyfully for **YHVH.**

But if they can't exercise self-control, they should get married (Greek: *gamesatosan*, *in the aorist imperative, indicating a strong command*). A person cannot live a happy life, much less serve **the Lord**, if **he** or **she** is continually burning with **sexual** desire – even if it never results in actual immorality. And in a society such as **Corinth's**, or ours, in which immorality is so prevalent and accepted, it is especially difficult not to fall into temptation. I believe that once **a couple** decides to get **married**, **they** should do it fairly soon. In the day of lowered standards, free expression, and constant suggestiveness, it's extremely difficult to stay **sexually** pure. So, **it is better to get married than to keep burning with sexual desire (7:9).** The practical problems of arranging for an early **marriage** are not nearly as serious as the danger of starting a **marriage** with immorality.

Deciding about **marriage** is obviously more difficult for the person who had strong

sexual desires, but who has no immediate prospect for a **husband** or **wife**. It is never, I repeat, NEVER, **God's** will for believers to marry unbelievers (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bi – Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**), but neither is it right to just marry the first believer who will say yes. Although we very much want to be **married**, we should be careful. Strong feelings of any sort tend to dull judgment and make one vulnerable and careless.

There are several things the believers in this dilemma should do:

First, they should not simply seek to be **married**, but should seek a person they can **love**, trust, and respect, letting **marriage** come as a response to that commitment of **love**. People who simply want to get **married** for the sake of getting **married** run a great risk of marrying the wrong person. If possible, **marry** your best friend. Believe me, you will need that friendship, trust and commitment when the hard times come. And they will.

Secondly, it's fine and normal to be on the lookout for the "right person," but the best way to *find* the right person is to *be* the right person. If believers are right with **God** and it is **His** will for them to be **married**, **He** will send the right person – and never to late. One caution, **the Adversary** will oftentimes send **his** "best" before **the Lord** sends **His** "best." You must rely on **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** for wisdom and discernment because **the Adversary himself masquerades as an angel of light (Second Corinthians 11:14).**

Thirdly, until the right person is found, our energy should be directed in ways that will be the most helpful in keeping our minds off **temptation**. Two of the best ways are using your spiritual gifts to serve **the Lord**, and physical exercise. We should avoid listening to, looking at, or being touched by anything that is **tempting**. Program your mind to focus only on what is good and helpful. We should take special care to follow **Paul's** instruction to **the Philippians, "In conclusion, brothers, focus your thoughts on what is true, noble, righteous, pure, lovable or admirable, on some virtue or on something praiseworthy" (Philippians 4:8).**

Fourthly, we should recognize that, until **God** gives us the right person, **He** will provide the strength to resist **temptation**. **No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation He will also provide the way out, so that you**

will be able to endure (10:13).[187]

Fifthly, and most importantly, pray you would be filled with **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, and ask for wisdom and guidance every day.