

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT UNMARRIED PEOPLE?

Message Title: What does the Bible Say About Unmarried People?

Topic: Singleness and Celibacy

Bible Verses: 1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 26-34, 37-38; Matthew 19:9-12

INTRODUCTION:

In many places unmarried people (or singles, as they are often called) **are looked upon as abnormal or inferior.** Married people often ask single people, “Why aren’t you married yet?” Married people often assume that a single person is living a sexually immoral life. Or they assume that a person is single because he or she has some defect which makes him or her undesirable as a mate.

The Bible does not view unmarried people in this way.

The Lord Jesus Christ was single. Jesus is the Son of God, whom we are called to imitate. The Apostle Paul was also single. Paul was the great missionary of the early church and author of 13 letters which are found in the Bible. Today we want to listen to the words of these two great unmarried men about the topic of singleness. Their words are found in the Bible, God’s holy Word. So their words are God’s own words about singleness.

First, let’s listen to the words of the Jesus, from Matthew 19:

I say that if your wife has not committed some terrible sexual sin, you must not divorce her to marry someone else. If you do, you are unfaithful.”
The disciples said, “If that’s how it is between a man and a woman, it’s better not to get married.”

Jesus told them, “Only those people who have been given the gift of staying single can accept this

Explanatory Notes:

Outline of Matthew 19:1-12:

1. Jesus’ says marriage is a lifelong relationship which people should not end by getting a divorce (19:1-9).
(see the message on divorce for a more complete outline and a message on these verses. You need not explain all of these verses in this message. Concentrate on verses 10-12 for this message)
2. Jesus’ disciples react with astonishment: “It’s better never to marry!” (19:10).
3. Jesus responds to his disciples (19:11-12)
 - A. Only those who are especially gifted by God can accept this idea (that it is better not to marry) (19:11)
 - B. There are some who never start a family because they are physically unable to have children (19:12a)
 - C. But there are also some who choose not to marry so that they can devote themselves more fully to serving God (19:12b)
 - D. Everyone who is able to make this choice should do so (19:12c).

teaching. Some people are unable to marry because of birth defects or because of what someone has done to their bodies. Others stay single in order to serve God better. Anyone who can accept this teaching should do so.”

Matthew 19:9-12, CEV

When Jesus said that people should never divorce, his disciples were astonished. “Oh my goodness!” they gasped, “If married people must stay together their whole lives, then it would be better never to marry at all!”

Jesus agreed with his disciples that it was good not to marry. He said, “Anyone who can accept this teaching should do so” (v. 12). But Jesus also explained that not everyone can or should remain single. Jesus told them, “Only those people who have been given the gift of staying single can accept this teaching” (v. 11).

So Jesus approved of both singleness and marriage as appropriate for his followers. We must each prayerfully determine what kind of person we are. How did God make us? Did he give us the ability to remain single? Or the ability to be faithful in marriage? We should be faithful to God with the special abilities he gives each one of us.

Now let’s hear the words of the Apostle Paul. Paul agrees with Jesus that it is good for some Christians to remain single. Paul also explains *why* we should remain single if we are able. This is what he writes:

I wish that all of you were [single] like me, but God has given different gifts to each of us. Here is my advice for people who have never been married and for widows. You should stay single, just as I am. But if you don’t have enough self-control, then go ahead and get married. After all, it is better to marry than to burn with desire.

We are now going through hard times, and I think it is best for you to stay as you are. If you are married, stay married. If you are not married, don’t try to get

A Paraphrased Summary of 1 Corinthians 7:

Verse 1:

The Corinthians’ Question:
“Is it best not to marry?”

Verses 2-9: Paul’s first

answer: “People whose sexual urges are too strong for them to control as single people should marry. A sexually intimate marriage will meet their sexual needs. But everyone who can remain single like me should do so.”

Verses 10-24: Paul’s second

answer: “Married people should remain married and not divorce. In all things (marriage, circumcision, social status) Christians should try to remain in their present conditions. They should not feel pressured to change.”

Verses 25-31: Paul’s third

answer:

“We are going through difficult times [of persecution]. And when the Lord returns soon, marriage and the business of our present lives will no longer mean anything. So it is best not to increase our present worries and troubles by marrying right now.”

Verses 32-35: Paul’s fourth

answer:

“Married people are concerned for the needs of their families. Single people have a greater opportunity to devote themselves to God’s service than married people have.”

married. It isn't wrong to marry, even if you have never been married before. But those who marry will have a lot of trouble, and I want to protect you from that.

*My friends, what I mean is that **the Lord will soon come, and it won't matter if you are married or not.** It will be all the same if you are crying or laughing, or if you are buying or are completely broke***. It won't make any difference how much good you are getting from this world or how much you like it. This world as we know it is now passing away.*

*I want all of you to be **free from worry.** An unmarried man worries about how to please the Lord. But a married man has more worries. He must worry about the things of this world, because he wants to please his wife. So he is pulled in two directions.*

*But it is better to have self-control and to make up your mind not to marry. **It is perfectly all right to marry, but it is better not to get married at all.***

1 Corinthians 7:7-9, 26-34, 37-38 CEV

We can summarize what Paul says into three thoughts.

First, like Jesus, Paul says that both marriage and singleness are appropriate for believers. He wishes everyone could be single as he is. But like Jesus, Paul says that each of us has different gifts (abilities given by God). One is blessed by God to remain single. Another is given the ability to marry.

Second, Paul points to the added difficulties marriage creates because of the troubled times in which Christians live.

- **He says that marriage only increases the worries and stresses of people who live in times of trouble and persecution.** Paul knew that Christians of his day were persecuted for their faith, just as many are today. In times of persecution we are tempted to deny our faith in order to protect our families. Paul wanted to spare his readers from the additional worries and temptations that marriage brings to people who live in difficult times.
- **Paul said that Jesus is coming back soon, and**

Verses 36-40: Paul repeats his instructions:

- "It is appropriate to marry, but it is better not to marry."
- "Married people may not divorce their spouses, but widows are free to remarry."

*****Broke** means "not having any money."

Special problems unmarried people face:

1. A low sense of self-worth.

Some want to marry, but do not find someone who wants to marry them. Others want to remain single, but suffer because people tell them that being single is inferior to being married.

As believers we need to be loving toward singles rather than reject them. We must not treat them as abnormal.

2. Loneliness. We all have a deep need to be loved and to be close to other people. Married people have a spouse to whom they can turn when they need love and emotional support. Single people do not have this support.

As believers we need to give singles the friendships, love and emotional support they need. Churches need to find ways to minister to singles of all ages.

3. Sexual temptation. God expects single people to remain celibate (to refrain from sexual acts). Sexual intercourse between singles is a sin which

everything will be different. It will be a whole new world. Why should we get married, Paul says, if we know Jesus will return soon to change everything?

Third, Paul points to the advantages that both marriage and singleness have.

- **Marriage has a special advantage:** if we are married, we are less tempted to fulfill our sexual desires in immoral ways.
- **Singleness also has a special advantage:** if we are single, we can serve the Lord with our undivided loyalty.

In the history of the Christian church, there were two very different interpretations of singleness.

Some Christians have taught that singleness is more holy than marriage and that virginity was more holy than sexual activity in marriage. They required priests to be celibate (single and sexually inactive). They viewed the decision to marry and have children as a “second best” way of following God.

Other Christians have taught that marriage is more holy than singleness. They viewed singleness as inferior to marriage. This is not a balanced view of the Bible, either.

It seems better to take the words of Jesus and Paul seriously. On the one hand, they both have a high view of marriage. On the other hand, both Jesus and Paul point to the practical advantages of singleness. They encourage us to seek singleness if God so gifts us.

What do Jesus’ and Paul’s words mean for us today?

1. Well, if you are single, you can rejoice! You are in good company! The Lord Jesus himself and the Apostle Paul were single also. God blesses single people if they are faithful to him and do not use their freedom to engage in sexual immorality. Don’t consider your singleness as a curse. Let the church, the family of God, be your family.

the Bible calls fornication. But the desire to have sex is a natural part of our physical life. Single people must struggle to control these normal, unfulfilled bodily urges.

As believers we need to help singles understand and accept their bodily urges as a good and natural part of the way God created them. But we must also help them find ways of expressing their sexuality through compassion, tenderness and affection in relationships rather than through sexual intercourse.

Special problems married people face:

1. Time demands:

Married people naturally devote time to their spouses and children. This gives them less time to devote to other activities such as church activities, ministry opportunities and spending time alone with God in study and prayer.

2. Money worries:

Married people, especially those with children, often have great financial responsibilities that many single people do not have.

3. Decision-making:

The process of making decisions is often slower for married couples than for singles because they must make decisions together. Often spouses need to discuss disagreements over decisions and come to a compromise. If they are in conflict, they must show love to each other and work through their differences. If

God considers you a special person and he gives you a special assignment. Use your singleness to devote yourself fully to love God and to build up his church. Then your singleness will be a blessing not only to you but to others also.

2. And, if you are married, you can rejoice too! Don't think, "I should have stayed single." Don't think, "Because I am married I am less loyal to God than a single person is." That is not true. God considers you a special person, too, and he gives you a special assignment as well. He has given you a family to love. They are your most important ministry. And they minister to you, too.

So whether you are single or married, rejoice in the unique blessings God gives you. And be faithful to the unique calling God gives you, too.

they have children, their major decisions must take their children's needs into consideration.

4. Child raising:

The task of raising children is a demanding one. God calls parents to help their children grow into people who love and honor him. But parents have much growing to do as well! Parenting is especially challenging because each child is different and has different needs. There is no instruction manual on parenting that gives us easy answers about the many difficult problems of child-rearing. These are problems singles do not face, and these problems are often time-consuming and emotionally exhausting.
