

The Church's Unmarried People

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

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Introduction:

In our sermon series *The Christian in Every Stage of Life*, we have looked at the church's infants, children, young adults, married persons, and parents.

- Today, I want to move on to look at the church's unmarried people.
- Of course when we looked at the church's young adults, that included unmarried people, but if you were here, you may remember that my focus was mainly on those who are somewhere between childhood and being settled into their calling.
 - This time I am talking about those who are adults at any age who are not married for whatever reason—not yet married, no longer married, not desiring to marry, whatever.
 - There is overlap with both the young adult category as well as the senior category.

Our Scripture reading related to this is 1 Corinthians 7.

1 Cor 7:1-40: Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman.* ² Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ³ Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. ⁵ Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. ⁷ For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that. ⁸ But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; ⁹ but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. ¹⁰ Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband. ¹¹ But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife. ¹² But to the rest I, not the

Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. ¹³ And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such *cases*. But God has called us to peace. ¹⁶ For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save *your* husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save *your* wife? ¹⁷ But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters*. ²⁰ Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. ²¹ Were you called *while* a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use *it*. ²² For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he

who is called *while* free is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brethren, let each one remain with God in that *state* in which he was called. ²⁵ Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. ²⁶ I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is: ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. ²⁹ But this I say, brethren, the time *is* short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, ³⁰ those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, ³¹ and those who use this world as not misusing *it*. For the form of this world is passing away. ³² But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. ³³ But

he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. ³⁴ There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband. ³⁵ And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction. ³⁶ But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry. ³⁷ Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. ³⁸ So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give *her* in marriage does better. ³⁹ A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But she is happier if she remains as she is, according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.

May the LORD bless the reading of His holy Word.

Marriage is in the world because God Himself instituted it at creation.

- As we have seen, the pattern He established for marriage is that a man leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and when they do, they become one flesh.
- But through the ages, there have been those who, for various reasons, do not marry.
 - The church at Corinth appears to have asked Paul some questions about whether this was an acceptable thing, or if everyone should pursue marriage.
 - Paul answers this question unequivocally.
 - Today we want to begin with his answer as an apostle of the Lord who spoke by the Holy Spirit:

I. Here the scriptures make it clear that it is good to be unmarried.

A. The context of this statement is fornication, so Paul expresses it like this:

1. "It is good for a man not to touch a woman (1 Cor 7:1)."
 - a. If you look back at the end of chapter 6, you can see that he was talking about fornication or sexual immorality.

- Not only adultery, but sexual involvement of any kind with someone to whom you are not married.
 - God did not institute sexual intimacy for any relationship except marriage.
 - To engage in it elsewhere is to sin against God.
- b. You can see from verse 2 that Paul is still thinking about fornication (or sexual immorality), because he says,
 - **v. 2: “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”**
- 2. This way of speaking makes it perfectly clear that for the Christian man, the options are either to not touch a woman or to marry.
 - Of course Paul does not mean that you can’t touch a woman’s shoulder or even give a brotherly kind of hug or kiss.
 - You are smart people and you know what he is talking about—you know the difference between a boy kissing his mom goodnight and a man touching a woman sexually.
 - Paul is talking about sexually charged touching—that it is good for a man not to touch a woman.
 - And because this is the biblical ethic, it means that when Paul says this, he is saying it is good and acceptable for a man not to marry.
 - There is no requirement that a Christian man marry.
- 3. However, if he is burning with sexual passion, as many men are, then it is better for him to marry than to leave himself in the place of temptation.
 - It is good for a man not to touch a woman, but it is not good for a man to leave himself in a state of temptation.
 - This is the plain sense of verse 2 and also of verses 8-9 where Paul says:
 - **8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*.**
 - It is also the plain sense of Paul’s injunction to those who are married not to deprive one another of sexual intimacy except when mutually agreed upon for times of fasting and prayer.

TRANS> But again, the point we are considering is the clear statement that it is good for a man not marry—not to touch a woman.

- B. But does this not contradict Genesis where God said that it is not good for the man to be alone?
1. No. The point of the statement in Genesis 2 is that God never intended Adam to be a solitary individual in the world—one without other humans.
 - It was His intent all along to create male and female and to ordain that they be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
 - But this does not mean that every man since Adam must have a wife and be fruitful and multiply by this means.

- There are other ways to be fruitful and multiply, especially now that the human race has fallen into sin and rebellion.
 - Paul laboured to be fruitful, not by bringing forth godly offspring, but by pouring himself out in evangelism.
 - It was very good for Paul not to touch a woman.
- 2. Of course it is also still true, that he who finds a wife finds a good thing.
 - Paul is not saying that the word of God is no longer true.
 - He is just saying that it is also good for a man not to marry, and that nobody should have any doubt about that.
- 3. He even says that there are times when it is better for a man not to touch a woman than to marry—each has his calling from God.
 - We will look at what he says about that in a moment.
 - But so far is Paul from forbidding people to marry that in 1 Timothy 4 Paul says that forbidding to marry and to abstain from certain foods is a doctrine of demons!
 - He saw the first beginnings of this teaching that later grew up in the great apostasy of the church that arose under the papacy.

TRANS> The point is not that it is required either to marry or not marry.

- The point is that it is good for a Christian to do either.

C. Paul lays down an important principle of Christian liberty in this chapter.

1. That when you become a Christian, you do not need to change your status.
 - There is no requirement to marry or to not marry, to continue as a slave or to become free, even to break off marriage to an unbeliever.
 - You don't have to change such things in coming to follow Christ.
 - You can follow Him as a servant, or as a free person; as a married person, or as an unmarried person.
2. In verse 17-28 he lays down the basic principle that with regard to these things you should continue as you were when you came to Christ.
 - In verse 20 he says, **“Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.”**
 - In verse 24, he says nearly the same thing, and in verse 27 he speaks specifically of marriage: **“Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.”**
 - But do not misunderstand him here.
 - He is not saying that after you become a Christian you are stuck with what you are—that you are not allowed to change.
 - The point is that you are not required to change.
 - It not required the way it is required to stop worshipping idols or to stop stealing or even to be baptised.
 - You must make those changes, but you are not required to marry or to not marry, to be circumcised or not circumcised.

TRANS> But there are special considerations for Christians about whether to marry or not that ought to be carefully weighed.

- It should be our desire to make the decision that will best facilitate our service to Christ.

II. Let's look at some of the special considerations that Christian should weigh when they are trying to decide if it is best for them to marry or not.

A. Persecution is a reason to consider abstaining from marriage. This is the one Paul addresses.

1. He refers to it as the present distress.

- You remember that in nearby Thessalonica, a similar city to Corinth, the believers were being severely persecuted.
 - And Paul knew that more persecution would come as the faith began to have more influence.
 - It is almost always that way when the gospel is first introduced in a place where it has not been planted before.
- Listen to his counsel in verses 25-28: **“Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. ²⁶ I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that *it is* good for a man to remain as he is: ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.”**

2. He is trying to spare them from the difficulty of being married and having children when persecution comes.

- If you are married, you have more to be concerned about... your wife, your children...
 - It is harder to be driven from employment, to be driven from your home, to be imprisoned or threatened with execution.
 - You rightly love your children and your wife and you want to look after them.
- The temptation can be greater to compromise or even to deny Christ in order to spare your family.
 - It is, actually, the worst thing you can do for your family, but it is still a great temptation when you know that by professing Christ, the persecutors will seek to harm them along with you... may even take them away.
- Paul gives the advice by the Holy Spirit to not marry at the present time because of the present distress.
 - Those thinking of seeking marriage should consider carefully, as it will make it more difficult to follow Christ if they marry.
 - If you want to do missions to savage tribes, it might be better to abstain.

B. Sexual immorality prior to marriage is a reason one might want to pursue marriage.

- This was an issue in Paul's day as well as ours—that you often have people who come to Christ who were sexually active but not married.

1. If one partner in a premarital sexual relationship is converted, they must break up when they come to Christ.
 - It is wrong for them to continue the sexual immorality—it is not even to be named among Christians...
 - And it would also be wrong for them to marry an unbeliever.
 - So that should stop the fornication, also they might try to lead their partner to salvation—especially if children are in the picture.
 - The new believer should also avoid ties such as joint custody.
2. If both partners are converted, (or if a believing couple falls into immorality) they should definitely consider marriage.
 - In the case of a believing couple, the man should pay alimony and offer to marry, but she and her father are not required to accept.
 - Exodus 22:16-17: **If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins.**
3. And if a man or a woman has had multiple partners (loose living), they may want to pursue marriage when they come to Christ.
 - It may be more difficult for them, having been sexually active, to cease.
 - The principle we say in 1 Cor 7:2 comes into play here: **Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.**
 - And so does 7:8-9: **But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.**
 - In Timothy Paul says that younger widows ordinarily should marry.

TRANS> The third consideration is might seem odd at first, but bear with me.

C. Selfishness is a reason to consider marriage—as part of your repentance.

1. Many unbelievers do not marry simply because they don't want the trouble of being responsible for another person.
 - They don't want to be under obligation to pour themselves out for anyone.
 - Marriage would cramp their style.
2. However, when a person like that is converted, everything changes!
 - Seeing how Christ gave Himself for them, they want to give themselves to others—they want to serve as He served and to love as He loved.
 - So if selfishness was the main reason they did not marry—and it is for many—now part of their turning to follow Christ may involve pursuing marriage.
3. This selfishness can be true of Christians who have become cold toward their Saviour as well.
 - It may not be the case at all that their reason for not marrying has been zeal to serve Christ better, but plain old selfishness.
 - For such persons, marriage may be just what they need—because marriage forces you (unless you are really derelict) into giving yourself for others.

TRANS> This last consideration about selfishness leads us to the very matter that is at the heart of choosing not to marry.

- That is what I want to look at now...

III. The special calling of unmarried persons in the church is to serve Jesus Christ.

A. The unmarried person is called to more service than the married person.

- In other words, their reason for not pursuing marriage should be that they might serve Christ more than they could if they married.

- Or, if they want to marry, but do not find marriage, they should pursue such service to Christ who has placed them in the unmarried state.

1. This call to greater service to Christ for unmarried persons is laid out for us in verses 32-34—starting in the middle of verse 32 where it states the factual difference between the married and the unmarried Christian:

- **32 He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. 34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband.”**

a. The idea here is that the married person has obligations—rightfully so—to their family.

- The married person might rise in the morning to pray, and then one of the kids comes and she has wet her bed.

- Or maybe she had a nightmare or has the croup.

- You have to tend to her—and then after that, you have to get breakfast for the little mouths in your house.

- The prayer time is history.

b. And then there is someone who needs to talk and this person is available on Friday night, but that is the night you were going to go out with your husband.

- And he already has to work late on Thursday, and on Saturday you will be preparing for the Lord’s Day, so you can’t change your date with your husband.

- You and your husband will have to decide what is best for you to do, and often it will be to keep your plans with each other.

2. If you are not married, you don’t have these concerns—this “problem” about pleasing your husband or caring for your wife.

- Don’t misunderstand—it is not really a problem for the married woman—as I showed you, you are a fruitful vine in your house when you submit to your husband as to the Lord...

- But it is a problem in terms of your prayer time and your service to needy people at times.

- But if you are unmarried, you are free and able to serve.

- Of course you can have the same kind of problem that you might already have things going on—but you have more freedom to minister to whatever needs arise in the church and in the community.

3. And so you should! You should do extra service.
 - a. You shouldn't be committed to your television show or your hobbies or whatever you like to do.
 - You should be doing more (not less) service to others outside the home than what the married person is doing.
 - God has placed you in a calling as far as your marital status that gives you more opportunities to do good.
 - b. Don't fall into the selfishness I spoke about before.
 - Just because you are not married does not mean that you should live for yourself.
 - It means, as Paul says, that you should care for the things of the LORD, how you may please Him (verse 32)!
 - You do not pour out yourself for a spouse, so pour yourself out for the Lord by pouring yourself out for other people.
 - Be like Jesus who went about doing good.
 - Or like Paul who poured himself out as a drink offering to God in service to others—who spent and was spent for them.
- B. Think about some of the things you can do more than married persons.
1. You can evangelise more.
 - You can take the time to hang out with an unbeliever who is interested, to go out to supper and talk to them.
 - You can invite them to church without having to double back because your car is already full.
 2. You can disciple new believers.
 - Help them to become grounded in the faith by hanging out with them and encouraging them to take those first steps of faith...
 - taking them along when you go to do service for others.
 - discussing the sermons with them
 - praying with them and for them and supporting them as they engage with their old friends.
 - helping to keep them accountable—something married people are often too distracted to do.
 3. You can go over to help someone who is sick or who just had a baby.
 - Or someone who is just busy—
 - A widow at Riverside used to do the ironing for all the women in the church—she had fun going from house to house and what a help it was to these women.
 4. You can take more time to do Bible study and to pray.
 - You can read books and encourage others in the body with what you are learning.
 - You can take on prayer requests and stay up with matters of prayer—and actually pray!
 - Isn't that better than using your free time to do some mindless recreation?
 - Not that there is no place for recreation—but not every night!

5. You can also be free to go to minister in dangerous places.
 - A single fellow can go open a mission in a place where it is not suitable to take a family.
 - That is much better than a married man sticking his children off in boarding school.
 - It is not right to abandon your children for the mission field.
 - Your first obligation is to them.
- C. Pouring out your life for others is the calling of you all, whether single or married, to the glory of Jesus Christ.
1. The married person with children is practically forced to do this (unless they are extremely derelict), but for the unmarried it is more voluntary.
 - It is expected of the married person by those looking on, but it is not expected of the unmarried person.
 2. That is what puts you in a unique place to bring glory to Christ... a place that the married person does not have.
 - Any unmarried person who pours out his life like this stands out among the unmarried people within our society.
 - So many of them are unmarried because of selfishness... but you are using your unmarried state to serve the LORD.
 - It is a beautiful thing to behold!
 - Love for Christ expressed in service to others is always beautiful.

IV. All of us in the church need to love our unmarried brothers and sisters.

- A. First, we need to pray for them—for their special example and their special temptations.
1. Pray that they will shine in their service and not give way to the temptation to be selfish...
 - And pray for their sexual purity as well—as they face those temptations and have less accountability.
 2. Remember that they do not have a spouse to pray for them like you do.
 - Nor do they have anyone who is always near to share their burdens with or to discuss their problems.
- B. Second, encourage them—especially when you see them pouring out their lives for Christ as I have described.
1. Don't be too proud to let them serve you when you are in need.
 - My tendency, when people offer to serve me, is often to say in my pride, "Oh no, I don't want you to do that for me."
 - But instead I should learn to say, "Thank you, that is so kind of you."
 - Our pride wants to refuse—but while you are putting your children to bed and washing their clothes and planning meals,
 - why not let someone who doesn't have all of that wash your windows or paint a room for you.

2. And encourage them by telling them what a great example they are of Christ and how refreshing it is to see them serving as they do.
 - Instead of saying things like, “When are you going to get married?” or “How is it that such a nice girl like you is not married?”
 - You can tell them what an inspiration and encouragement they are to you.
- Of course you can only say that if it is true!
3. If it is not true, if they are a selfish single person—
 - You might look for ways to prod them along—suggest things they can do for others or invite them along to help you when you are serving others!
 - You might even encourage them to consider marriage—because as I said before, marriage forces you to pour your life out for others—unless you are extremely derelict.

TRANS> But if their example is good, encourage them in what they are doing!

C. And that leads to the next thing—learn from their good example!

1. See the beauty of Christ in their example and learn of Him.
 - Let it deepen your admiration for Him!
 - Do they pour out their lives for others?
 - How much more did Jesus do that for all of us!
 - He gave Himself to die for our sins so that we might be saved.
 - Like Jesus, this is a voluntary service.
 - Their service is not like your service. You have a duty to minister to your spouse and children, but their service is voluntary like Christ’s.
 - That makes it a stronger example than the service of married people for each other.
2. Christ is the only one who will keep an unmarried person engaged in voluntary service.
 - Without Him, they will wash out.
 - But with Him, what a beautiful example they are for all of us to behold.
 - Paul said that it was because he was such a debtor to Christ that he was constrained by His love to pour out His life for Him and for others.
3. When we see a godly example, we will often feel the pangs of guilt.
 - But you shouldn’t in the sense that you feel as if you ought to be doing all that the unmarried person is doing—you can’t—not and do what the LORD has given you to do...
 - But guilt might be appropriate when you look at your attitude.
 - You are serving your family because you have to, but if you didn’t have to, your attitude is such that you wouldn’t!
 - When you feel the pangs of guilt from the good example of the unmarried person who serves Christ... do what you ought to do.
 - Go to Christ with that guilt for cleansing.

- Rejoice all the more in our Saviour who has pardoned us and who will help us to grow after the example of those who follow Him.

Conclusion: Single people, married people, of course you all come short in your service.

- But Jesus came to save sinners. Come to Him for forgiveness and transformation.
 - He will welcome you.

And remember, it is good for us all for some Christians not to marry.