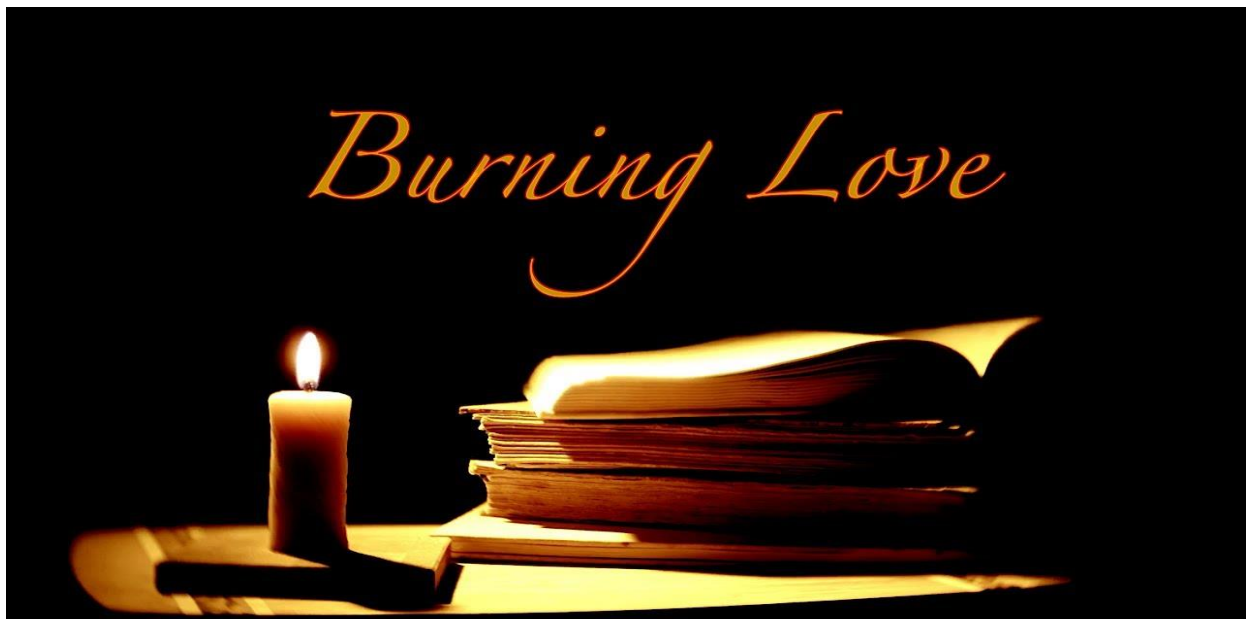


COMMENTARIES COMPARED
EXPOSITION ANCIENT & MODERN:
BETTER TO MARRY THAN TO BURN!

By David Lee Burris





1 Corinthians 7:8-9

1 Corinthians 7:8-9

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

(NIV)

1 Corinthians 7:8-9

- 8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.
- 9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

(KJV)

Spiritual Status Pros & Cons: Marriage vs. Chastity

THE VERY FIRST COMMANDMENT God gave to human beings was “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” This decree was first given to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28), and again when Noah left the Ark (Genesis 9:1). But later the New Testament appears to discourage marriage and childbearing:

- Matthew 19:12, where Christ says: “there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”
- 1 Corinthians 7: 8-9, 25–29: “But I say to the unmarried and 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.**”

²⁵Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the LORD: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the LORD to be faithful. ²⁶I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. ²⁷Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. ²⁸But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless, such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

²⁹But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none.

- 1 Timothy 5:11–12: “But refuse to enroll younger widows; for when they grow wanton against Christ they desire to marry, and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.” (RSV)

Speaking almost entirely in symbols, veiled in mysteries, and describing an era of which we can have only a fleeting and partial glimpse, the Revelation of John is hardly a book about which to be dogmatic or use as a complete guide for day-to-day life. Yet it is hard to deny that the Revelation contains divine decrees or the religious values of Christians at the time it was written.

It is at least clear that Chapter 14 reflects an indication that they discouraged marriage and sex: according to verses 3 and 4, the most blessed of the redeemed in heaven (“first fruits for God”) will be people who were both totally truthful and “have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste” (RSV); a note in the *Oxford Annotated Revised Standard Version* indicates that the last word can be translated “virgins.”

How do the Creator’s commandments or decrees given to Adam and Noah and their families fit in with those in the New Testament? Around AD 247, **Cyprian of Carthage harmonized two decrees or commandments:**

The first decree commanded to increase and to multiply; the second enjoined continency. While the world is still rough and void, we are propagated by the fruitful begetting of numbers, and we increase to the enlargement of the human race. Now, when the world is filled and the earth supplied, they who can receive continency, living after the manner of eunuchs, are made eunuchs unto the kingdom. Nor does the LORD command this, but He exhorts it; nor does He impose the yoke of necessity, since the free choice of the will is left.

Cyprian was born of wealthy pagan parents around AD 200. Within two years of being converted to Christianity in AD 246, he became bishop, or pastor, of Carthage in what is now Tunisia. He remained bishop of that city until his martyrdom in AD 258. While bishop, he was very prominent and active in the church throughout, the area between Libya and Morocco, and even in Italy.

95. Cyprian, *On the Dress of Virgins* 23 (ANF 5:436).¹

¹ Brattston, D. W. T., & Ward, K. (2020). [Bible problems solved by early christians](#). Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications.

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

But if they cannot contain, &c. Or "if they do not contain", as the words may be rendered, and as almost all versions do render them; if they have not the gift of continency; if they are not willing, and do not think fit to contain, for none are to be compelled; if either therefore they want a will or power to contain, let them marry; it is not only lawful for them to marry, but it is right and best for them; hence it appears that second marriages are lawful, which were condemned by some of the ancients: for it is better to marry than to burn; or be burnt; not with material fire, as Judah ordered Tamar to be brought forth and burnt with, for whoredom; nor with hell fire, the just demerit of uncleanness; but with the fire of lust itself; and so the **Syriac version reads it, "it is better to marry than to be burnt" "with lust"**; when persons not only find in them some lustful motions and desires, and a glowing heat of concupiscence; but are as it were all on fire with the lusts of the flesh, and in great danger of being drawn into the commission of fornication, adultery, or other pollutions, and even unnatural lusts; it is better to enter into the marriage state, though it may have its cares, inconveniences, and difficulties, than to be under temptations and inclinations to such defilements: so the Jews often express the lust of concupiscence by fire; they tell (g) us a

"story of R. Amram, that he redeemed all the captives, men and women; and the women and the virgins dwelt in a chamber in his house alone; one time, Satan kindled in him, , "the fire of lust", and he set a ladder to go up to them, and when he came upon the steps of the ladder, he began to cry with a loud voice, , "fire in the house of Amram, fire in the house of Amram": and the men came to quench the fire, and found nothing burning; for it was only his intention to cause to cease from him the fire of lust; and his thought ceased and his mind grew cool; and they asked him, why he mocked them? he replied, for this is a greater "fire" than all the fires in the world, for it is the fire of hell:"

This story is also told in the Talmud (h), with some little variation: so we read of one that is , "**inflamed**" (i), or all on fire "**with the corruption of nature**", who does not direct his heart to God: and such a man that finds his corruptions prevail over him, he ought to marry, they say (k), as a proper remedy against it:

"he whose mind is intent upon the law continually, and learns it as Ben Azzai, and cleaves to it all his days, and does not marry a wife, there is no iniquity in his hands, and that because his corruption does not prevail over him; but if his corruption prevails over him, , "he ought to marry a wife":

and that for the very reason the apostle here gives. The Ethiopic version reads, "it is better to marry than to commit fornication"; that and adultery both are expressed by fire and burning, with the Jews, as they prove from [Hosea 7:4](#) (l).

(g) Caphtor, fol. 62. 1.(h) T. Bab. Kiddushin, fol. 81. 1.(i) Zohar in Lev. fol. 21. 1.(k) Maimon. Hilch. Ishot, c. 15. sect. 3.(l) Vet. Nizzachon, p. 43, 44.

What does it mean that it is better to marry than to burn in 1st Corinthians 7:9?

Question: "What does it mean that it is better to marry than to burn in 1 Corinthians 7:9?"

Answer: [First Corinthians 7:8-9](#) says, "Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion." The King James version says simply "to burn," which has led to misunderstanding. Some have speculated that the word *burn* refers to burning in hell; however, when we take the passage in context, we see Paul is saying that, even though singleness is his preference, it is not wrong to marry. In fact, for those with strong sexual urges, it is better to marry than to be consumed by unfulfilled desire.

Paul's statement that it is better to marry than to burn supports the Bible's strong stand against sexual immorality: if an unmarried couple are burning with passion for each other, they need to *marry*, not give in to sin. Many try to justify sexual activities before [marriage](#) with excuses such as "we're engaged" or "we love each other." But the Bible makes no such allowances. In [1 Corinthians 7:1-2](#), Paul addresses the distinction between the married and the unmarried and states that sexual fulfillment is a primary reason for marriage: "Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband." **Marriage is God's plan for the fulfillment of sexual desires, and any sexual expression outside of marriage is sin ([Hebrews 13:4](#)).**

[Sexual desires](#) blossom during puberty and increase as the body matures. The sexual desires themselves are not wrong. They are part of developing into healthy men and women. What we do about those desires determines whether or not they lead to sin. [James 1:13-15](#) explains the progression from the temptation to the sin: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”

With his assertion that it is better to marry than to burn, Paul sounds a warning for those caught in the progression toward sin. [1 Thess. 4:3-7](#) also addresses the need to control our passions: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid [sexual immorality](#); that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”

When we refuse to control our bodies in ways that are holy & honorable, we are in danger of allowing the natural sexual drive to turn into lust—or causing someone else to be filled with lust. This is especially true during late adolescence and the early twenties when hormones are raging and bodies are at their fittest. Sexual desire is at its peak, and the foolish or untaught dive into sexual sin before realizing the lifelong consequences. God’s design is for those who “burn” with such desire to seek a marriage partner and keep their desires under control until the wedding night. Those who can maintain moral purity shouldn’t feel pressured to marry. [Singleness](#) is a perfectly acceptable lifestyle. But, if one is beginning to “burn” with passion, it is time to seek God’s guidance in finding a spouse.

- *Got Questions*

Let's Talk "It's Better to Marry Than to Burn"

by Sheila Wray Gregoire



What does 1 Corinthians 7:9—"it is better to marry than to burn with passion"—mean?

Apparently, the members of the church had written to Paul what appears to be a simple and specific argument in favor of celibacy: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman," they write. We do not know who wrote these words to Paul or why they made this claim.

But Paul's response to their claims provides a basis for the later Christian views on marriage and celibacy, sex and self-control, and ethics and immorality.

He writes,

"Because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give his wife her conjugal rights & likewise the wife to her husband. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set of time, to devote yourselves to prayer & then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **This I say by way of concession, not of command."**

For Paul, marriage was a concession: He appears to view it reluctantly as merely an acceptable choice for those who cannot control themselves. He goes on to say, “I wish that all were as I myself am,” implying at the very least that he is not married. And he confirms this in the passage that follows,

“To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.”

Marriage, in Paul’s view, is the lesser choice. It is for those who cannot control themselves. Although difficult, remaining unmarried and choosing celibacy, seems to be the higher ideal.

Interpretations of Paul

As a scholar of early Christianity, I know that Scriptural interpretations are always dynamic; Scripture is read and understood by different Christians in different time periods and places. So, it is not surprising that a short time later, Paul’s writings found new meaning as asceticism – practices of self-control that included fasting, celibacy, and solitude – began to spread within Christianity.

A second-century expansion on the story of Paul, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a largely fictional story about Paul’s missionary efforts in what is now modern Turkey, casts Paul primarily as a preacher of self-control and celibacy. *In this story, Paul blesses “those who have wives as if they have them not.”* Such a phrase may sound strange to modern readers. But as monasticism grew, some married Christian couples were faced with a problem: They didn’t want to divorce their spouses, because Scripture spoke against divorce. And yet they wanted to choose the life of celibacy. So, these clerics chose to “live as brother and sister,” or “to have wives as if they had them not.”

At the same time, stories of failures to keep vows of celibacy abounded: stories of monks and nuns who lived together and bore children, stories of monks who took mistresses, and stories about behaviors that today would be considered sexual abuse.

Apostate Church Develops Chastity Doctrine

Any Apostate Church Indicators?

-- **IMPROBABLE:**

- Fourth Kingdom of Daniel 2: 40, 41
- Little Horn on Fourth Beast of Daniel 7: 8 – 25
- Ten Horns on Dragon & Leopard of Revelation 12 & 13
- Babylon – Mother & Daughters of Revelation 17 & 18

-- **PROBABLE:**

Acts 20: 28 - 30: “grievous wolves among you”

Matthew 4: 1 – 3: “...in the latter times some will depart... giving heed to... doctrines of demons. ...

forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods ... created to be received with thanks

HISTORY OF
SACERDOTAL CELIBACY
IN THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BY
Lea
HENRY C. LEA, LL.D.
111

THIRD EDITION, REVISED

Ὁὐ γὰρ Θεοῦ ἐστὶ κινεῖν ἐπὶ τὰ παραφύσιν
ATHENAGORÆ pro Christianis Legatio

VOL. II

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1907

"Throughout the first centuries of Christianity, clergy continued to get married, though marriage was not required. It was not until the turn of the first millennium that the church started to canonically regulate clerical marriage, mainly in response to clerical abuses and corruption. Of particular concern was the transmission at the death of a clergyman of church property to his wife and children. The Council of Pavia (1018), for example, issued regulations on how to deal with children of clergy, declaring them serfs of the church, unable to be ordained and barring them from inheriting their father's benefices (income connected to a church office or parish)." – Religion Magazine

The Charism of Priestly Celibacy

BY [FR. FREDERICK L. MILLER, STD](#)

According to these contemporary historians and theologians, Christ stands at the origin of priestly celibacy. The Twelve Apostles, having lived in Christ's company for three years, chose his particular *lifestyle*. They left everything to be with him and follow him. Those who succeeded the Twelve in the apostolic ministry were expected, even if married, to live in continence for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.³

Over the past several decades, there has been a heightened awareness of celibacy as a *charismatic gift*. A charism is a **gift of the Holy Spirit**, a grace, given to an individual not primarily for his own sanctification, but rather for the good of others in the Church. Priestly celibacy, then, is a gift given to a man for the sake of service as a priest. I am suggesting that the celibacy of the priest is a special variation of the charism of celibacy that is given liberally in the Church to many who are not called to share in the priesthood of Christ. Since priestly celibacy is for the sake of sharing in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Good Shepherd,⁴ it is valuable to ponder the spiritual physiognomy of the charism of ministerial celibacy, that is, what the grace entails.

The **grace of celibacy** is recognized not only in the desire to imitate Christ, but also in a deep longing for the *exclusive, definitive, and total choice of the unique and supreme love of Jesus Christ (Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, no. 14). The grace of celibacy opens the priest to a deep life of communion with Christ in prayer, a prayer that is infused by the Holy Spirit, contemplative prayer. It is imperative that we explore the intimate relationship that must exist between celibacy and contemplation in the life of the priest.

The Church discerns in the internal and external forum whether or not a man is capable of practicing lifelong continence for the sake of the Kingdom of God. The Church also must discern if the man possesses the affective maturity to love the Church as his spouse and all the members of the Church as his brothers and sisters, sons and daughters in Christ. Finally, the Church discerns whether or not the candidate shares Christ's desire to be united with all people and is capable to be a **living instrument of Christ**, the Priest.

The possession of the charism does not alleviate the struggles involved in fidelity to the virtue of chastity nor does it dismiss the recipient from practicing the **virile asceticism** that protects and fosters both the virtue and the charism. It would be foolish to downplay the ascetical dimensions of priestly celibacy. Celibacy involves a renunciation of human goods that are very good. One may say that celibacy opens a space in the human heart that can only be filled by the love of Christ for His people. The renunciation that celibacy entails motivates the priest to place all of his masculine affectivity at the service of the Kingdom of God and thereby to love the people of God with Christ's own love.

Theological Rationale of Clerical Celibacy: Eschatological Vision & Heaven Pre-figure

Application: Celibacy and Marriage

In the spousal meaning of the body, men and women are complementary in their bodies. A man's body is made for a woman, and a woman's body is made for a man. We see this in the very nature of the male and female body. But here you might ask, if we are made to give of ourselves in marriage, what about priests and nuns? The Catholic Church clearly thinks some people shouldn't be married? How do they fit in the picture?

Yes, the Catholic Church teaches that some men and women are called to remain celibate — but to understand this teaching, let's take a look at the Gospel of Matthew:

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom. (Mt 19:12)

First off, a clarification: Jesus uses the term "eunuch" to imply a certain self-denial implicit in the celibate vocation. Make no mistake, celibacy is difficult. Those called to it must deny themselves the pleasure, companionship and comfort of an ordinary sexual relationship. The celibate person makes a complete gift of their sexuality to God. Everyone is called to love God in different ways & the celibate person is called to love God in way that parallels and **pre-figures the heavenly marriage**, the marriage involving the resurrection of the body. When Jesus refers to those who "make themselves eunuchs for sake of the kingdom," He is referring to men and women who decide to forego the sexual relations to devote themselves in a special way to God.

Thus, the celibate person still realizes the spousal meaning of their body — they just do so in a different way. Priests, nuns and all consecrated celibates reserve themselves exclusively for God and the Church. **They literally take God and the Church as their spouse.** Thus, the celibate person *is* married; it's simply a different sort of marriage. In fact, it's like the heavenly marriage. Remember, Christ said that in heaven "they are neither married nor given in marriage," but instead all are devoted exclusively to God. This is similar to celibacy! The celibate person voluntarily chooses to give their heart to God and God alone.

CATHOLIC THEOLOGY. “A look at Scripture and how Jesus himself lived is helpful to see the foundations on which priest’s life is modeled. Jesus did not marry. He also spoke positively about those who remain celibate “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:12). Indeed, Jesus chose, from among his followers, certain men to be with him and become “fishers of men” (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17). His invitation to them was to leave everything behind for the sake of the kingdom of God. Therefore, this **practice of total dedication** to God in and through Christ goes back to the very beginning of discipleship. Today as well, men are chosen by God to “to consecrate themselves with **undivided heart** to the Lord” (CCC, No. 1579).

Jesus is not the only person in the Bible, however, to have lived a single life with the intention of being consecrated for God’s purposes. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, appears to have remained celibate. He was called from his youth (Jer. 1: 6,7) and never mentions a wife or family like some of the other prophets. Another example, closer to the time of Jesus, is John the Baptist. The last in the long line of biblical prophets, John’s entire life was lived as a sign that pointed to Jesus, even from his time in the womb (Luke 1: 41-44). Everything about him pointed to the transcendent realm, including his choice to forego a wife and children. While it is true celibacy was not a common practice at the time of Christ, it was not unheard of. In fact, there are examples from Qumran, a desert community in existence around the time of Jesus, of a type of celibacy lived in community.

Getting back to the definition of celibacy mentioned above, it related only to the state of being unmarried. Any discussion on celibacy must relate back to chastity, which is the virtue by which a person integrates his or her sexuality in a healthy way appropriate to their state in life. The goal of chastity is the wholeness and integrity of the person in his bodily and spiritual being...

This is true for married persons as well as celibate persons. However, chastity in the context of consecrated life entails refraining from any behaviors in the realm of sexuality that belong properly to marriage, as well as avoiding any offenses against chastity such as pornography or fornication.

Is it “unnatural” to lead a celibate life and, therefore, practice continence within chastity? In one sense, yes, and in another, no. The proper path of usual of sexual expression for most people is that of marriage, in which two persons give each other their bodies as “a sign and pledge of spiritual communion” (CCC, No. 2360).

The married state is good & beautiful, and at the same time **God is more beautiful and better**. He is so good, in fact, that it is legitimate to offer everything to him and live for him alone. A consecrated person witnesses to that by the very way he or she lives. The highest form of love is not the love between husband and wife, it is the love of God, charity. This charity can & should inform all other relationships of love. This means that they are rooted in a person’s relationship with God and lead to a further and deeper love of God.

In addition, Jesus tells us that there will be no marriage in heaven. Rather, he says, in “the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30). For this reason, the consecrated life or **the celibate life is an eschatological signpost** that points to heaven. Essentially, the message is: Remember where you ultimately want to be headed. Remember your end. Do what it takes to get there.

Returning to an earlier question, **living chastity for the kingdom is not “unnatural” – it is supernatural. It is to live as God’s messenger, all day, every day.** ANNA MARIE MCGUAN

The theological basis for priestly celibacy

“It is not possible to order life by means of the law and to canalize the passions by moral precept. As followers of Christ, we must aim for that pure love which renounces life. «You have heard that it was said: ‘You shall not commit adultery’. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart» (Mt 5:27-28). Who can escape [temptation] down in the depths of his heart? The law has become an absolute, at the same time attracting us and judging us. We shall seek our strength in Christ and accept we have to make breaks with the world. Immediately after extending [sexual sin] to the most secret desires of the heart, Jesus goes on as follows: «If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell...» (Mt 5:29-30). Waiting for Christ to return and make us holy, we have to live in the world and, to give significance to this waiting and make it something real, we ought to accept sacrifice in our lives.

The offering of priestly celibacy

Observing celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven does not mean being any the less a man; by renouncing a natural form of existence, the priest discovers life in all its fullness. Christ was certainly no less of a man because he did not have affections other than those for his brethren, and a bride other than the Church.

Hence the use of celibacy, the renunciation of the old order of creation for the new order of the kingdom of heaven, stands in the perspective of the deep demands made by the gospel, «for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven» (Mt 22:30).

In the new order of the Last Days, in which we live, God sets certain **signs of the kingdom of heaven in his Church, of which celibacy is one**. At the beginning of the first Christian century, St Ignatius of Antioch bears witness to the existence of men and women who choose this path «for honor of God». He writes to Polycarp: «Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in the flesh and the spirit. And recommend my brothers to love their wives as the Lord loved the Church (cf Eph 5:25-29). If any of them can persevere in chastity in honor of the Lord's flesh, let them do so without boasting about it.»³

So, St Ignatius relates the celibate state to Christ's human nature, in perspective of the incarnation which was to usher in a new era. It is consecrated «in honor of the Lord's flesh», in the spirit of imitation and glorification of the life led by Jesus while among us.

The eschatological significance of celibacy

Besides the practical and the interior senses which we have described, the state of celibacy also has an eschatological meaning. Voluntary celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is sign of a new order in which marriage is no longer, as it was in the Old Testament, necessary to assure a holy progeny to Abraham, the father of all believers. For in the Church, our being children of God and the fellowship of believers are of the spiritual order.

«The time is short», says St Paul, «...the form of this world is passing away.» Because of this certainty that the age is coming to an end and that the kingdom is at hand, Christians should have a **spirit of detachment** with regard to the things of this world. «Therefore, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it» (1 Cor 7:29-31).

The eschatological sense, the certainty of being at the last act of history and the expectation of Christ's second coming, prompts the Christian not to be too attached to the realities of human life, to marriage, to suffering, to joy or to property. Of course, it is proper to the vocation of the married man to please his wife & concern himself with the things of the world, but he ought to keep reminding himself that the form of this world is passing away. He shouldn't attribute excessive importance to his sorrows and his joys, knowing that in the kingdom of heaven those who now weep will be comforted and that the joy there will be incomparably greater than any experienced here below. Lastly, he must be completely convinced that, in the order of the kingdom, the rich will be driven away empty-handed and that the earth belongs to the meek. He should, therefore, live his life undominated by the allurements of the world.

To the flippant question put by Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection) as to which of her seven successive husbands a woman would find herself married in the after-life, Jesus replied: «The sons of this age marry & are given in marriage; but those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection» (Lk 20:34-36; Mk 12:25; Mt 22:30). Consecrated celibacy is a sign of the resurrection and of the kingdom of God which is drawing near, for in the resurrection and the kingdom there will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage. **Celibacy, in the Church, thus draws attention to the new order of the gospel, whereas marriage has its roots in the old order.** In the kingdom of God, the fullness of love will be such that no one will feel the need for a **limited intimacy** any more. On the contrary, it would seem like a **diminution of love**.

Furthermore, celibacy relates to the resurrection of the dead; it is a **sign of eternity, of incorruptibility**, of life. For marriage has as its natural end the procreation of children, it assures the continuance of the human race and the creation of new beings, since human beings are fated to die and need to leave successors. But at the resurrection of the dead, those who have been accounted worthy will no more see death: 'They cannot die anymore because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection» (Lk 20:36). In the other world, since they are immortal, there is no further need for them to make sure that they have descendants. Besides, in the kingdom of God, there is one sole Father, since all, like the angels, are called sons of God. The celibate state, on account of this relationship with the resurrection of the dead, with eternity and with the angels, is a sign of the world to come. - *Max Thurian*, Theologian

**ANSWER FOUND IN THE TEMPORARY CONTEXT OF:
Verse 26 - "Due to The Present Distress"**

What Is the "Gift" of Celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7:7?

By **Wayne Jackson**

•

Occasionally, when one of some years & experience believes he has heard about every devious manipulation of scripture that is possible, he must pause and confess that he has not. There is always a new, bizarre twist to some text. Let me introduce you to one recent that engaged my attention, resulting in an uncommon degree of dismay. It involves the "gift" of celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7). Exactly what is this? And how does it relate to one's sexual conduct?

God's Law of Divorce and Remarriage

The New Testament teaches that there is but **one** cause for a divinely sanctioned divorce, with the option to remarry. The cause is fornication, and the license to divorce is for the **innocent victim** whose marriage has been violated by an adulterous spouse. According to Matthew 19:9, the innocent party has the right of divorce and subsequent remarriage, should he/she so choose at some subsequent point in time. Here is what the Lord said:

"Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for the cause of fornication, and shall marry another, is committing adultery: and he who marries her who has been put away is [also] committing adultery" (Matthew 19:9; cf. 5:32).

Incidentally, the parallel text in Mark's Gospel provides the same privilege for the woman as Matthew's account does for the man (cf. Mark 10:12). The rare view that **only men** have a scriptural right of divorce/remarriage is utterly void of divine sanction.

A New Method of Evasion

A recent writer has adopted a most novel position; one certainly deserving of refutation.

A philanderer adulterated his marriage, and was divorced by his faithful Christian wife. Initially he correctly concluded that he was not free to enter a new marital union. However, a friend ultimately persuaded him that he could remarry — with absolute impunity. What was the argument that convinced him of this option? It was a strange twist to 1 Corinthians 7:7. First, let us reflect upon the background to the text that is being employed to justify the position under review.

The Corinthian Context

First Corinthians, chapter 7, begins Paul's response to certain questions submitted to him by the saints in Corinth (7:1). In this chapter, the issue revolved around various aspects of marriage. Though the questions aren't stated explicitly, they may be deduced somewhat by the advice/answers supplied by the apostle.

For example, if a man is unmarried, but has strong sexual urges, how may he satisfy this legitimate inclination of his body? Might he simply find some woman, perhaps a prostitute, which to gratify his desire? Paul's answer is an unequivocal, "No." Such, the apostle suggests, would be "fornication" (v. 2) — a sin that will condemn the offender (6:9-10; cf. Galatians 5:19-21, etc.). Paul's solution is: let him find a wife.

But what if he cannot find an appropriate wife? What should he do? He could keep looking; in the interim, he must remain celibate until he finds one. In the mean-time he can work on developing character traits — like "self-control."

It has long been acknowledged that there are a variety of issues addressed by Paul in this segment of his epistle. Some are binding as law (as in vv. 1-2); on the other hand, at times the apostle offers seasoned, apostolic advice.

In several instances he counsels against marriage. This was not a mere exaltation of celibacy as a life-style of superior merit; rather, it was on account of some very difficult times that lay ahead for these Christians. Note the following.

Paul speaks of a “distress” (persecution) that already was underway (v. 26). There would be a “tribulation in the flesh” (v. 28). These days would be characterized by “cares” or anxieties (v. 32). The hardships would create a “distraction” for those attempting to maintain their fidelity to Jesus (v. 35). Hence, it could be “better” not to be involved in marital unions under such circumstances (v. 38). One certainly might be “happier” if he did not have to witness a precious companion suffering persecution (v. 40). Such could test his faith severely.

Self-Control

Within this discussion is a consideration of the matter of “incontinency” (vv. 5-7). The Greek word is *akrasia*, literally “not controlled.” Its opposite is *enkrateia*, self-controlled (later cataloged as one of the qualifications of an elder — Titus 1:8). These terms distinguish the person who has his desires/emotions under control, vs. the one who does not. Vile persons who make no attempt to exercise “self-control” are to be avoided by God’s people (2nd Tim. 3:3). The Greeks considered the control of one’s passions “an essential virtue for the honest person” (C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, Vol. 1, p. 60).

As a part of the discussion, apparently some of the Corinthian Christians wanted to know if it was permissible for a husband and wife to remain apart sexually for a period of time. The apostle replied that such would be allowed, provided there is the mutual agreement of both parties. The goal was that they might be focused more upon spiritual concerns.

He advised (v. 5), however, that their celibacy not be protracted too long, lest in their “incontinency,” they should be tempted to engage in some sexually immoral act.

Out of this background Paul expresses the wish that all Christians were as he was, i.e., able to live the celibate life in view of the tribulations that were descending upon them. He recognized, however, “that each man has his own gift from God, one of one kind, and one of another” (v. 7).

The Perverted Argument

Now we are down to the main point. Some suggest that while the divorced fornicator generally is not authorized to marry, if he/she does not possess God’s “gift” of self-control, then he/she is permitted to go forward and enter a new “marital” arrangement.

Let us carefully analyze the logic employed in this specious argument.

1. Who is to say otherwise if the divorced fornicator simply says: “God did not give me the ‘gift’ of self-control; thus I am free to seek a new companion”? The claim becomes the authority for the act.
2. If the divorced fornicator decides to enter an “adulterous” relationship, is not God to blame for the sin, since supposedly he didn’t provide the “gift” of self-control to the fornicating person — either during the marriage, or after the divorce?
3. What if a single person decides that they have not been given the “gift” of self-control, but cannot find a suitable marriage partner? Can he/she, under the rationale cited above, find someone to assist with the intemperance “problem,” until a proper marriage partner comes along?

The Nature of the “Gift”

The truth of the matter is, God frequently is said to be the “giver” of certain qualities, simply because he has provided the **means and motivation** for the cultivation of the desirable traits. Such does not mean, however, that he drops some “gift” from heaven unconditionally, i.e., irrespective of one’s personal volitional exercise.

Salvation is God's gift (Romans 6:23), but redemption is accessed by one's obedience to Christ (Hebrews 5:9), not simply as an unconditional bestowal. Repentance is said to be a gift from God (Acts 11:18), but repentance (i.e., sorrow for sin and a resolution to abandon one's evil conduct) must be a response on **man's** part (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30), and such is a difficult, on-going effort.

Several "gifts" are said bestowed upon some Christians, one is that of "generously contributing" to the Lord's cause (Romans 12:6-8). There seems to be a considerable number of church members who are convinced they have never been bequeathed the "gift" of being generous contributors to the advancement of the gospel. Does one suppose that they are exempt from the demands of 1 Corinthians 16:2 for lack of the "gift"? Why didn't Ananias and Sapphira think of that (Acts 5:1ff)?

The argument under consideration constitutes twisting of scripture of the worst sort (cf. 2 Peter 3:16), and those attempting to justify sinful conduct thereby ought to abandon the disposition immediately and seek Heaven's pardon.

Barnes' Notes on the Bible

I suppose - I think; I give the following advice.

For the present distress - In the present state of trial. The word "distress" (ἀνάγκην anagkēn, necessity) denotes calamity, persecution, trial, etc.; see [Luke 21:23](#). The word rendered "present" (ἐνεστῶσαν enestōsan) denotes that which "urges on," or that which at that time presses on, or afflicts. Here it is implied:

(1) That at that time they were subject to trials so severe as to render the advice which he was about to give proper; and,

(2) That he by no means meant that this should be a "permanent arrangement" in the church, and of course it cannot be urged as an argument for the monastic system.

What the "urgent distress" of this time was, is not certainly known. If the Epistle was written about 59 a.d. (see the introduction), it was in the time of Nero; and probably he had already begun to oppress and persecute Christians. At all events, it is evident that the Christians at Corinth were subject to some trials which rendered the cares of the marriage life undesirable.

It is good for a man so to be - The emphasis here is on the word "so" οὕτως houtōs; that is, it is best for a man to conduct "in the following manner;" the word so referring to the advice which follows. "I advise that he conduct in the following manner, to wit." Most commentators suppose that it means "as he is:" that is, unmarried; but the interpretation proposed above best suits the connection. The advice given is in the following verses.

Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

I suppose, therefore, that this is good,.... The opinion of the apostle, the sentiment of his mind, his judgment in this case were, that it was better, more advisable and eligible, for persons that were single to continue so; his reason for it follows,

for the present necessity; by which is meant **not the shortness of life**, and the necessity of dying, when husband and wife must part, upon which trouble ensues; nor the various sorrows, cares, encumbrances, trials, and exercises that attend a conjugal state, as bearing and bringing forth, and bringing up children, provision for the family, &c. which are common to all, and at all times more or less; **but the present time of persecution, under which the churches of Christ were**; agreeably the Syriac version reads it, , "because of the necessity of the time", or season: using the very Greek word in text; as the Targumists (q) also have frequently adopted it into their language, and use the phrase , "an hour, or time of necessity", for a time of great affliction and distress, just as the apostle does here; because this was the present case of the Christians, he thought it most prudent for such as were single to remain so; since as they were often obliged to move from place to place, to fly from one city to another, this would be very incommodious for married persons, who might have young children to take care of, and provide for; see [Matthew 24:19](#) upon a like account, the Jewish doctors advise to the same the apostle here does (r);

"from the day that the empire is extended, which decrees hard decrees upon us, and causes the law and the commandments to cease from us, and does not suffer us to circumcise children; it is right that we agree among ourselves, , not to marry, and beget children:"

I say it is good for a man so to be; to remain unmarried, to live a single life, to be a virgin; for the word "virgin", as here used, relates to men as well as maidens, and denotes the single state of either. The apostle does not add, "even as I"; as he does in [1 Corinthians 7:8](#) which seems to confirm the conjecture already made, that he was not a bachelor, but a widower; otherwise he would doubtless have enforced this advice by his own example, as before.

(q) Targum Jon. & Hieros. in [Genesis 22](#).14. & xxxviii. 25. & Targum Sheni in Esth. v. 1.(r) T. Bab. Bava Bathra, fol. 60. 2.

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Better to Marry than to Burn

Mark Dunagan
07/13/08 - Sunday Evening

[1 Corinthians 7:9](#)

In this lesson we want to address the claim that 1 Corinthians chapter 7 is the definitive chapter on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage in the New Testament and the statement, "It is better to marry than to burn" (7:9) is the foundational verse that underlies all questions that pertain to this topic. Yet from the outset can one honestly consider one passage as more foundational than any other passage? Isn't it not more wise to take all the verses on the topic and come up with the right conclusion? It is unwise to decide that one passage defines all others or trumps all others.

• **The Application**

Many have believed that [Matthew 5:32](#) and [19:9](#), along with other passages, teach there is only one biblical cause for divorce, that is sexual immorality on the part of one's spouse, and that any remarriage that does not follow such an act of sexual immorality, is adultery, and must be ceased if one wants to be right with God. Others state this conclusion is erroneous on a couple of points:

Some are claiming that what Jesus taught in the Gospels only applied to the Jews, and does not apply to Christians or to anyone living after the cross. Yet the context of Matthew 5 argues that Jesus was not teaching the Law of Moses, rather, He was teaching the gospel (Matthew 4:23). Jesus makes it clear in Luke 16:16, that from the time of John the Baptist, the gospel was being proclaimed by both John and Himself. In addition, it seems very strange for Jesus to command His disciples to teach new converts “to observe all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20), if in fact, everything that He taught while on earth does not apply to anyone after the cross. Finally, in Matthew 19:8 Jesus makes it very clear that what He was teaching on this point was not the Law, but what had been true “from the beginning”.

There is another problem with claiming that [Matthew 5:32](#) or [Matthew 19:9](#) do not apply to anyone after the cross: What passage after the cross authorizes one to put away their mate for sexual immorality? If these passages do not apply today, if they were just Old Testament teaching, then it would be sinful to divorce your mate even if they cheated on you, for 1 Corinthians 7 does not mention the exception cause and neither does any other passage outside the Gospels. It is inconsistent to appeal to [Matthew 19:9](#) when authorizing a divorce on the grounds of sexual immorality (which most people on all sides of the marriage question do), yet condemning those who appeal to the passage as applying to us today.

Some argue that in telling people that their *remarriage* violates [Matthew 19:9](#), we are commanding people to *burn rather than marry*. Instead, we should be teaching people to *marry rather than burn*. Thus [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) is being used to justify all remarriages on the premise that people always have a right to marry if they are burning with passion—no matter how many times they have been married before. We will address this argument in this next section; the Bible clearly teaches that one can lose their right to remarry.

- [1 Timothy 4:3](#) “Men who forbid marriage”

It is being taught that anytime we require certain people to remain unmarried in order to be right with God that we are teaching a doctrine of demons, and are liars and hypocrites (4:1-2), and are violating this passage. Yet, I find the following teachers preached the gospel honorably when forbidding sinful marriages:

1. John the Baptist condemned an adulterous marriage, "For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife'" ([Mark 6:18](#)).
2. Jesus forbid certain individuals to remarry ([Matthew 19:9](#)) "and marries another woman commits adultery".
3. Jesus also forbid certain marriages, that is, "whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" ([Matthew 5:32](#)).
4. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul forbids a certain remarriage, that is, "but if she does leave, let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband" (7:11). Here, a Christian woman who leaves her Christian husband is not allowed to remarry anyone else. She only has two options, remain single (celibate) or reconcile with her husband, all other options, such as remarrying someone else are forbidden.

Thus, we must conclude that [1 Timothy 4:3](#) was never written to give God's stamp of approval on all and every marriage or remarriage, rather it simply condemns those who forbid people marrying who have *God's permission* or Scriptural authority to marry. To say that the person who committed adultery has a right to remarry, or that I have a right to marry someone who was put away because of their adultery, or that I have a right to remarry though my spouse did not cheat on me, is perverting [1 Corinthians 7:9](#). It is misusing that passage to ignore all the other passages on the topic.

In the context, [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) is not directed to people who walked out on their mates, or people who were put away because of adultery, rather it is addressed to the unmarried and widows (7:8). It is addressed to people who have the *right* to marry. Carefully note the difference between 7:8-9 and 7:10-11. In these verses the unmarried and widows have the choice between remaining single or marrying. Yet to the married (7:10), the wife and husband are commanded not to leave, and if they have, they cannot argue, "I have the right to marry and not burn with passion". Rather, they must either reconcile or remain celibate. Now remaining celibate may be one factor of many which may cause such a person to "burn with passion", yet in this case [1st Corinthians 7:9](#) does not apply. It doesn't apply because they already were in a marriage and they chose to walk out of it. Anytime one walks out of a marriage without a scriptural cause for divorce they are forfeiting their privilege in [1 Corinthians 7:9](#).

- **Another Application**

If [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) is the definitive passage & in a sense overrules [Matthew 5:32](#) and [Matthew 19:9](#) and allows all divorced people (no matter what the cause of the divorce) to marry, because "it is better to marry than to burn", then what will prevent the next generation from arguing that [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) also trumps passages that either condemn homosexuality ([1 Corinthians 6:9](#)) or polygamy ([Matthew 19:5-6](#))? What if the homosexual is burning with passion, should they not marry instead of burn? And what about the polygamist burning for another wife? What about the man or woman who is already married, but they are sexually unfulfilled and are burning with passion as well? Does [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) command them to divorce and marry someone who will meet their needs? Think about this: If [1 Corinthians 7:9](#) allows someone to marry *after* violating [Matthew 19:9](#), what is to prevent it from being used as a justification to get out of an "unhappy marriage"?

- **1 Corinthians 7:20 “Remain in that condition in which he was called”**

It is claimed that this is a second foundation stone in God's teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage, that whatever marriage a person was in when baptized, is authorized by God, even if it was formed in violation of [Matthew 19:9](#) and/or [5:32](#). “This command to remain in the circumstances in which one has been called has been given applications which Paul never intended for it to bear since the very earliest of Christian exegesis. In the days of Tertullian (160-240 A.D.), ‘manufacturers of idols claimed this same principle as justifying their continuing to earn a living in this way.’ Some among us today want to use this passage to justify the continuance of a marital relationship which the Scriptures label as adulterous”. We should note the social circumstances that the gospel has labeled as morally neutral (7:18-28), in contrast there are certain marital conditions of which the Lord does not approve ([Matthew 5:32](#); [19:9](#); [Mark 6:17-18](#); [Romans 7:3](#)). The social circumstances are the very social conditions in which one became a Christian. “As God has called each” (7:17). Now we all know that one cannot become a Christian while engaging in a sinful lifestyle or while being involved in a sinful relationship. Before some of the Corinthians accepted the gospel call, that is, before they were baptized, they had to stop sinful practices ([1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#)). Thus, it would be a misuse of this verse to claim that one could remain a homosexual, or remain a thief or remain an adulterer. McGuiggan makes a good comment when he says, “And of course God doesn't give a person an immoral relationship” (p. 110). Obviously, whatever “condition” I am to remain in when I accept the gospel call, must be a condition that does not violate any passages, for one of the first things that the gospel tells me to do prior to becoming a Christian, is to repent ([Acts 2:38](#)).

- These are conditions that exist after repentance and baptism (7:20).
- A condition in which can remain *with God* (7:24).

- A condition that does not matter, has no negative spiritual ramifications (7:21).
- A condition that is *nothing* (7:19).
- A condition in which one is still keeping the commandments of God (7:19).
- A condition that God has *assigned* (7:17).

It is an abuse of this text to put into [1 Corinthians 7:20](#) some man or woman who has been unfaithful to their marriage vows and who has ignored Jesus' teaching on this subject. Something is definitely wrong with our method of interpretation if we are telling someone to remain in a condition that Jesus said is adultery ([Matthew 19:9](#)). [Hebrews 1:1-2](#) reveals that Jesus is God's final spokesman, and in [Acts 3:22](#) Peter identifies Jesus as "the Prophet" mentioned by Moses in Deuteronomy 18, to which we are to give heed. As a result, I am not going to buy into the idea that what He said while upon the earth has no application to me today. I am going to heed *everything He said*—how about you?



