

# The Necessity of Marriage

By Dennis Hevener

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Genesis 2 tells us that it is not good for mankind to be alone, then goes on to describe the establishment of the permanent, exclusive sexual relationship we call marriage. It describes the creation of Adam and Eve. Adam could pal around with numerous angels and Jesus himself. Yet God ordained that this was not enough. We are incomplete by ourselves. We need a spouse.

(This is not to say that single people cannot be happy. In a sinful world, not everyone will be able to marry. Some people are “blessed” with the gift of singleness, as the Apostle Paul apparently was. I must say, this is a dubious “gift,” one I am thankful my wife and I do not have!)

The chapter ends by stating that the couple shall cleave to each other and become one flesh – an obvious reference to marriage and sex – and adds that they were naked and unashamed. This passage is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7-8, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:16, and Ephesians 5:31.

Note that the marital relationship is part of being created in God’s image. God is not alone, but exists as a trinity. Like a husband and wife, the members of the Godhead are separate, yet one.

However, the Christian church does not fully embrace marriage. The general attitude is that if you want to fully devote your life to serving God, it is best to stay single. And married people who are truly holy will not devote a lot of time or effort to sex.

Christianity’s lukewarm view of marriage is due largely to ascetic pagan influences in early Christianity, and a selective and out-of-context reading of the writings of Paul.

Augustine wrote that sexual intercourse propagates the original sin, and “When [in Eden] those parts of the body were not impelled by turbulent ardor but brought into play by voluntary exercise as the need [for children] arose, and the male seed could be introduced into the wife's uterus without damage to the maidenhead, even as now the menstrual flow can issue from a maiden's uterus without any such damage.” See <https://www.heavenlymarriage.org/early-christian-view-of-sex-and-marriage> and <https://www.historynewsnetwork.org/article/when-did-the-catholic-church-decide-priests-should> for more information.

In 1139, the Roman Catholic church officially prohibited priests from marrying, but the first written prohibition was from 304 CE.

For more information on ascetic pagan cults who were opposed to sex, and the influence they had on the Corinthians and early Christianity as a whole, See

[https://www.academia.edu/1435162/1 Corinthians 7 and Asceticism](https://www.academia.edu/1435162/1_Corinthians_7_and_Asceticism), and the first appendix in this article: <https://www.heavenlymarriage.org/divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-bible>

## Paul and Marriage

A selective reading of the Apostle Paul seems supports Augustine. In 1 Cor 7, Paul writes. “I wish everyone were single, just as I am.... I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord’s work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband.” (NLT).

We will explore the writings of Paul in detail, and show that they do, in fact, support marriage. There are some mitigating factors. The historical context of this chapter must be understood before concluding 1 Cor 7’s preference for singleness is blanket counsel.

There are a number of apparent problems and inconsistencies that become evident when critically reading in 1 Cor 7. According to most translations, Paul starts out by stating saying that it is “good for a man not to touch a woman.” He follows that up by saying “However, to avoid fornication, everyone should have a spouse.” He then goes on to elaborate: Do not deny sex to each other. Abstinence from sex is only permitted to a married couple on a temporary basis.

So far Paul seems to have gone from saying that it would be good not to marry, but we should marry anyway to avoid fornication. But then he reverses direction again, saying that it is not a sin to marry if you can’t control your passions, but it is really best to stay single. So which is it, Paul? Should everyone have a spouse, or not?

As we will see, there is no inconsistencies in Paul’s writings if understood in the historical context and translated without the anti-marriage biases that have affected the Church for so long.

Let’s start with verse 1. Translation of it is problematic. As we can see from the first verse, the Corinthians had written Paul, seeking his counsel regarding marriage.

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. (KJV).

This makes it sound like Paul himself is making the statement himself and that he is opposed to sex and marriage. However, these are actually the words of some Corinthians who thought they could live holier lives by avoiding sex and marriage, writing Paul to ask if he agreed. The New Living Translation, while putting Paul on record as agreeing with the Corinthians, does acknowledge that Paul was responding to a question.

Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations.

Any translation that puts Paul on record as saying that “it is good not to touch a woman” has to be wrong. It flies in the face of Genesis 2. Paul, a Jewish Rabbi and Pharisee would not have blatantly contradicted the Torah.

David Stern, in his *Jewish New Testament*, translates verse 1 as Paul merely quoting the question that the Corinthians asked, not agreeing with it. He translates verse 1 thusly:

Now to deal with the questions you wrote about: "Is it good for a man to keep away from women?"

David Instone-Brewer agrees (*Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, page 72.)

Paul’s answer is a resounding “no,” at least in verse 2:

“To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.”

The Greek word translated “however” or “nonetheless” at the beginning of verse 2 is another case of translator bias. The Greek word *dia*, Strong’s Concordance G1223, occurs 672 other times in the Greek manuscript. It is a preposition, commonly translated as “by” or “through.” Nowhere else is it translated as “however” or “nonetheless.” Strong does not even list “however” or “nonetheless” in the definitions for *dia*. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1223/kjv/tr/0-1/>

So, verse 2 should be translated

Well, because of the danger of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (JNT)

Why does Paul starts out by disagreeing with the Corinthians’ supposition that marriage best be avoided, then goes on to promote singleness for those who are not already married? One possible explanation is that verses 2 through 5 are general counsel, and verses 6 and on are counsel specific to the Corinthians. As we will see, this indeed is the case.

Paul goes on to explain that, *due to the current distress* (7:26) it is preferable to remain single if you are not already married. Instone-Brewer says that there was a famine at that time (*Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*, p. 72.) Getting married meant having and raising children, which is not easy in times of famine.

Furthermore, it appears that Paul and the early Christians believed the second coming was imminent.

It is also likely that the now-common belief that there will be no marriage in heaven had not yet been formulated. If one believed that the second coming was imminent, and that you could get married in heaven, postponing a wedding made sense. (For more information on the possibility of marriage in heaven, see <https://www.heavenlymarriage.org/marriage-in-heaven>. In summary, this article proposes that when Jesus said there would be no marriage in heaven, He was referring to Levirate marriage only, which allowed a man to marry his deceased brother’s wife. Levirate marriage will no longer exist in heaven because there will be no death.)

It was Paul who, in Ephesians 5, holds marriage up as a model for the relationship between Christ and the church. It is hard to get a more enthusiastic endorsement of marriage than this! This must be taken into account when considering 1 Cor 7. Ephesians was written some 5 or 6 years after 1 Corinthians. The famine spoken of by Instone-Brewer was certainly over by then, and Jesus had not returned. It appears that Paul had warmed up to marriage.

There is no reason to apply Paul's preference for singleness in times of famine as general counsel for all people at all times. If you are single, and want to marry, you are following God's will for your life. He designed you for marriage, and wants you to marry.

Often I will see a post in an online Christian marriage forum, by someone lamenting that they cannot find someone to marry. Invariably, someone will reply that they should rely on God. He should be sufficient. I reply that no, God isn't enough. He Himself says so!

What if you are divorced? Many Christian denominations prohibit remarriage even for those who have divorce forced upon them. However, this position is difficult to support from scripture. A good case can be made that scripture allows *anyone* to marry. See <https://www.heavenlymarriage.org/divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-bible>

If you are already married, rest assured that you are living within in God's plan for your life. Thank Him for your spouse and the gift of marriage, and recommit to each other.

## One Flesh

Any discussion of Biblical marriage would be remiss not to discuss the one-flesh aspect. Marriage is much more than a license to have sex. Marriage is, first and foremost, a relationship. Our need in marriage is more than just physical release.

What does the term "one flesh" mean exactly? "Flesh" is variously translated as meat, blood relatives, mankind, and collectively to all people and animals on the earth.

However, the phrase "one flesh" only refers to the relationship resulting from a sexual relationship. "One flesh" appears in Gen 2:24 and the various New Testament passages referencing it.

## The Necessity of Sex in Marriage

The term "one flesh" does not refer specifically to the sex act. It is the relationship that is the *result* of having sex. Note the order of events in Genesis 2:24. The man shall cleave to his wife, *then* they become one flesh.

Sexual intercourse is necessary to consummate marriage, and to maintain it. As we saw in 1 Cor 7, Paul is adamant that married people not deny sex to each other.

## Marriage Above All Other Human Relationships

Gen 2:24 states that we shall leave our mother and father. Even though we are commanded to honor our parents, and care for our parents (see <https://www.heavenlymarriage.org/MyFathersKeeper>) and our children, the marital relationship is closer and takes priority. Furthermore, blood relatives are never referred to as “one flesh.” Instead, they are referred to as “my flesh” or “our flesh” (Gen 29:14, 37:27).

## Exclusive and Permanent

Modern science confirms that the sex act causes chemical and emotional bonding (see <https://people.howstuffworks.com/love7.htm>). Because of this, God designed sex for the exclusive and permanent relationship of marriage.

Sex is designed by God to turn the couple’s desires towards each other and away from others. Once a couple has sex, their desire for sex with each other increases, and continues to increase as the relationship continues. Unfortunately, in a fallen world, there are factors that can interfere with sexual bonding and the desire for sexual exclusivity.

Paul refers to Gen 2:24 when criticizing the Corinthians for the sin of prostitution: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh” (1 Cor 6:15-16). Even sex with a prostitute results in bonding!

Unfortunately, our society has strayed from reserving sex for marriage. A lot of people enter a sexual relationship with no expectations of permanency. This trend has infected the church. 57% of Christians agree that sex between unmarried adults in a committed relationship is always or sometimes acceptable. 50% agree that casual sex between consenting adults, not necessarily in a committed relationship is acceptable. Evangelical Christians who are regular church attenders rate a little better than Christians as a whole. The figures are 46% and 36% respectively.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/08/31/half-of-u-s-christians-say-casual-sex-between-consenting-adults-is-sometimes-or-always-acceptable/>

Note that “sex” is not defined by this study. Some of the respondents that believe that sex outside of marriage is not acceptable are likely engaging in oral or anal sex. Ephesians 5:3 says there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality. While scripture does not list what activities constitute sex and are therefore immoral outside of marriage, these activities are arguably more intimate than vaginal sex, and most certainly qualify. Bringing each other to orgasm by any means seems almost certain to cause the bonding effect of sex.

Sex outside of marriage is nothing new, of course. But it is so rampant now, it is affecting the ability of couples to bond. Because of the bonding created by sex, scripture is clear that sex must not be engaged in until the couple are in a binding marriage. Studies confirm that the more sexual partners a person has before marriage, the less happy that marriage is likely to be.

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/39717/how-a-new-study-says-premarital-sex-affects-marital-happiness>

<https://hackspirit.com/study-reveals-surprising-link-between-number-of-sexual-partners-and-marriage-happiness/>

God permits divorce, but only for limited reasons. Obviously divorce is devastating to children. But it is also devastating to the individual spouses. One of the reasons divorce is limited is because of the sexual bonding the couple shares. Sexual deprivation is forbidden by 1 Cor 7. Divorce certainly deprives sex to the spouse who has been cast aside.

Without marriage, one partner can freely leave the relationship, leaving their partner with no recourse. While a married partner may still leave without the agreement of their spouse, the existence of a marriage makes leaving more difficult, and gives the partner wishing to maintain the marriage some measure of protection.

Psychology Today states that “...unhappily married adults who divorced were no happier than unhappily married adults who stayed married. Divorce did not typically reduce symptoms of depression, raise self-esteem, or increase a sense of mastery.”

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/better-divorce/202212/will-you-be-happier-after-divorce>

Note that the one flesh relationship is so sacred that divorce is not permitted simply because both parties want out. The Psychology Today article states “Many unhappy marriages in the study improved in five years.” This is confirmed by Shaunti Feldhahn in her book, *The Good News About Marriage*. This short book is a worthwhile and encouraging read. She debunks the 50% divorce rate myth, and shows that most marriages are happy. On page 109, she references a study showing that 80% of the most deeply-hurting couples are happy after five years, if they stick with their marriages.

## Conclusion

God designed us to be married. The Christian church has historically not embraced marriage due to pagan influences and a misreading of Paul’s writings. Those who are single and pursue marriage are acting within God’s design for their lives.

Sex creates a bond that goes far beyond the physical. It creates a “one flesh” relationship that is closer than that of blood relatives. The one flesh relationship is not only physical, but also chemical, emotional, and spiritual. Scripture requires that marriage take priority over all other human relationships.

In order to maintain and grow this one-flesh relationship, married couples must make sex a priority. We should strive not only to meet our spouse’s needs, but go beyond this minimum requirement to have a truly spectacular sex life. A couple should stay in shape. Middle-aged and older couples should see a Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy doctor to make sure their sex hormones are optimized.

Equally important is to nourish the relationship outside the bedroom. One flesh, after all, is more than just sex. The whole relationship must take priority over all other earthly concerns. Spend time together and have fun together! Continue to invest and grow your marriage by reading, attending marriage conferences, etc. to keep growing the relationship. See a Christian counselor to discuss any longstanding unresolved issues.

Anything spent on your marriage is a small price to pay for the happiness of two people, and will be much cheaper than a divorce! (I say that only partially in jest.)