

**The Gifts of Singleness
and Marriage, 1 Cor 7**

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Introduction

My covenant with my spouse is the shadow of which my covenant with Jesus is the substance.

“Make Jesus your one true love or you’ll never know true love.”
Timothy Keller

1 Corinthians 7

⁷I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. ⁸Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. ⁹But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹⁰To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. ¹¹But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

1 Corinthians 7

²⁶Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. ²⁹What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not;

1 Corinthians 7

³⁰those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. ³²I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord.

1 Corinthians 7

³³But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

A radical view

Paul gives us a radical view of both single-ness and marriage.

Tim Keller: "Christianity is the first religion, philosophy, or thought-system that ever lifted up long-term, singleness for adults as a perfectly good way to live – this was absolutely stunning in the first century."

A radical view

Stanley Hauerwas: "One of the clearest differences between Christianity and all other religions was Christianity's idea of singleness as a paradigm way of life for its followers. Paul and Jesus both say that some people will choose not to be married and that's a good thing. This was revolutionary in ancient societies. The implications have seldom been appreciated: Since Jesus and Paul it broke the absolute necessity of the family; now creating a family is not something we had to do."

A radical view

Rodney Stark: "If Christian women became widowed they enjoyed substantial advantages over those around them. Pagan widows faced great social pressure to remarry. Caesar Augustus had widows fined if they failed to remarry within two years. But among Christians widowhood was highly respected and the church stood ready to sustain poor widows, allowing them a choice whether they wanted to remarry or not."

A radical view

Earnest Becker, The Denial of Death: "Secular Western society is the first society that has a widespread belief that there is no ultimate future. There's never been a society that has had such an understanding of the insignificance of human life, and as a result there has never been a society that puts so much emphasis on finding your one true love. We secular people still need to know that our life matters in the grand scheme of things, we still want to merge ourselves with some higher meaning in trust and gratitude,

A radical view

"...but if we no longer have God, how do we do this? One of the first ways that occurred to the modern person was the romantic solution. The self-glorification that human beings need in our innermost being we now look for not in God, but in the love partner. What is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to this position? We want to be rid of our faults, rid of our feelings of nothingness, we want to be justified, we want to know that our existence has not been in vain – we want redemption, nothing less."

A radical view

Tim Keller: "Paul gives us the highest view of sex anyone ever had and then he says it's quite OK to live your whole life without it... Christians have a higher view of sexuality and yet we're more free from it than anyone who ever lived."

The radical hope

Paul, and others like him, could give up the significance, security, and status that come with family because in Jesus they now had:

1. The ultimate family (see Mark 10.29-30)
2. The ultimate future
3. The ultimate Lover

The foretaste of our future hope sets us free in the present world (1 Cor 7.29-31): Overlap of the ages...

The radical devotion

Both singleness and marriage are gifts (1 Cor 7.7) and opportunity to display 'undivided devotion to the Lord' (1 Cor 7.32-35), but as a single adult it is easier to display this undivided devotion.

conclusion

My shadow points you to me, but I don't point you to my shadow.

"Make Jesus your one true love or you'll never know true love." Timothy Keller
