

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 9

The Gospel and Singleness

1 Corinthians 7:6–9, 25-38

1 Corinthians 7:6-9

“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.”

1. a) What kinds of stigma could people generally have of singles?

- Unfulfilled physically
- Unfulfilled psychologically
- Loss of potential (e.g. having children)
- Vulnerable
- Unwanted
- Defective
- Socially awkward
- Left on the shelf
- Leftover

b) Why do these types of views arise?

- Marriage is seen as a means of self-fulfilment
- This view is based on the idea that marriage can fulfil all our needs
- The implication is that the primary goal of life is to be happy and God owes that to us

2. a) In v. 7, Paul says “But each one has his own gift from God”. Which gift is he referring to?

- Gift of singleness

b) What are the characteristics of this gift?

- Not overly tempted to sexual immorality

- Devoted to serving the Lord

c) What is the alternative for someone who recognises that he or she does not have this gift?

- v. 9 - “but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion”

1 Corinthians 7:25-38

“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.”

3. God gives us a default state of singleness. One of the advantages of being single is having less trouble than married couples. Why is this the case?

- Marriage has its own set of problems and pressures
- Singleness has less worldly troubles associated with it

4. Another advantage of being single is the flexibility in terms of time. What does Paul discuss regarding this limited time we have?

- We live with very limited amount of time
- This could be used devotedly for the things of the Lord

5. a) Having single minded focus on the kingdom of God is another advantage of singleness. Why can't married couples have single minded focus on the kingdom of God?

- The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord
- The married man is anxious about worldly things - how to please his wife
- His interests are divided
- Applies to women towards their husbands as well

b) Does it mean that a single person is holier than a married person? What are the implications?

- Does not mean a single person is holier than a married person
- The single person has less pressure on time and focus

6. In terms of personal fulfilment, 1 Cor. 7:38-40 recommends that singleness is better in light of the kingdom of God. Why?

- Fulfilment should come from being the person who God wants us to be
- Fulfilment should not be found in another person
- As a single who is better able to focus on the kingdom of God, that fulfilment can be found

7. a) Is marriage a journey or a destination? Why?

b) Should we find our ultimate fulfilment in marriage? Why or why not?

8. a) Based on Walter Trobisch's "Love is a Feeling to be Learned", what is the key to a fulfilled life?

- To give up oneself

b) Does this apply to single or married people? Explain.

- To give up oneself is as important for a single person as it is for one who is married
- Those who learn this art will never be lonely even if they are single
- Those who don't will always be lonely even though they are married
- The task we have to face is the same whether we are married or we are single to live a fulfilled life in spite of many unfulfilled desires

9. Is personal fulfilment found in marriage? Discuss.

- Worth, fulfilment, and peace are not exclusively questions of biology
- They transcend our situations
- In acceptance lies peace

10. Myth of singleness #1: Unless you have a spouse and a family, you cannot possibly be a legitimate person.

Why is this false? Discuss.

11. Myth of singleness #2: Unless you have sex and romance and love, you cannot possibly be fulfilled.

Why is this false? Discuss.

12. a) Tim Keller says that marriage is “to help my marriage partner be everything that Christ wants him or her to be. It’s supposed to be a way of service and not just self-fulfilment”.

How does marriage make the other partner become everything that Christ wants him or her to be?

b) Who alone can truly give the fulfilment we are seeking for (in a spouse/family)?

- The Lord Jesus Christ

Takeaway

- A. Singleness is a gift and the default state that God gives to every person
- B. Advantages of being single:
 - a. Less trouble
 - b. Limited time
 - c. Single minded focus on the kingdom
 - d. Personal fulfilment
- C. Marriage is nobody's ultimate destination because one or the other will die
 - a. Only in heaven will there be complete fulfilment
- D. Fulfilment should come from being the person who God wants us to be and cannot be found in another person

Case Study

Case 1 – Commitment

Part 1

Gopal Adlani was a young up and coming church leader in the 3rd Baptist church. He was single and struggled with sexual desire which was not uncommon in his age group. In fact at one stage he had an addiction to porn which he had overcome with prayer and help of an accountability partner. He really wanted to get married and did not believe that he had a gift of singleness. His parents have made arrangements for him to be match made with a young Christian woman from Andhra Pradesh in India. She comes from a Methodist church there, wanted to have kids but is not a graduate. He sighted her picture and noticed she was a little bit on the plump side but had a sweet face.

Can you discuss his options below and state the pros and cons of each option please?

- A. Commit the issue to God in prayer and accept his parents offer and have her brought over from India for a short courtship and then if there are no outstanding unacceptable issues just

marry her believing that marriage is about commitment. He believed that love can grow and love is a decision.

B. Commit the issue to God in prayer and accept his parents offer and have her brought over from India for a short courtship and if he falls in love with her then he will marry her. The important thing for him is chemistry. He must feel attracted to her and she to him. He believes if it is Gods will then the short courtship will do the trick.

C. Commit the issue to God in prayer and reject his parents offer and meanwhile continue to serve God in church believing that He will bring someone suitable in the future. He believes that God will bring this about naturally and that match making is ungodly and a thing of the past.

Case 1 (continued) – Commitment

Part 2

Gopal Adlani chose option A and after 2 years of marriage he finds out that the wife has an awesome temper, totally untidy and now refuses to have children nor have sex frequently with him (he wanted it every night). They have fights all the time and there is a lot of bitterness built up due to cultural differences. He also suspects she is not a Christian after all from the way she behaves. He believes she is a legalist who grew up in church believing in working for salvation and that the gospel has not really gripped her heart.

Which option should he choose and why?

A. Divorce the horrible wife as he was tricked into marrying her because her parents had fraudulently passed her off as a Christian which was the reason he married her and now she was giving him so much trouble because they are unequally yoked. He quotes 1 Cor 7 as justification as well for divorcing her.

B. Divorce the horrible wife on the grounds that she refuses to have children nor sex and 1 Cor 7 has stated that her body belongs to him and he has rights and privileges which were denied to him in this case.

C. Go for counselling with a Christian marriage counsellor in church to work out the issues affecting them. His duty in marriage is to love his wife as his way of glorifying God and his love for her cannot be contingent on her responses. We all marry the “wrong person” , we just need to be the right person for marriage. The process will mature his own faith. His Christian witness and influence on her will make it possible for her to really understand the gospel and come to faith