

Focus Text

“The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. 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 of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

(Matthew 19:10–12, ESV)

Singleness

The disciples were overwhelmed by the seriousness with which Jesus approached marriage. Like many others, they had grown up hearing that if a woman displeased her husband in any way, he could simply give her a certificate of divorce and send her away. However, Jesus calls them back to Genesis chapter 2, reminding them that marriage is about becoming whole. He teaches that divorce is a painful and destructive separation that God does not condone. It was only permitted through Moses as a necessary pathway because of humanity's sinful and broken nature. Hearing this strict and disciplined version of marriage, the disciples concluded that it might be better not to marry at all.

Jesus then reveals that this teaching is not for everyone, implying that for most people, singleness is not a viable option due to the reality of sexual temptation. The Apostle Paul echoes this, reminding us that if one is burning with desire, it is best to marry and enjoy intimacy within the proper covenant of marriage. Yet, Paul also teaches that it is good to remain single if one is able to do so. While most may struggle to live a celibate life without falling into temptation, this does not mean that a life of singleness is a negative thing.

In modern times, there is often confusion regarding the direct link between relationships, sex, and love. People frequently combine all three, treating them as synonymous. It is important for the church to understand that those who do not feel called to marriage are not oddities to be avoided or forced into relationships. Single people are fully capable of great love and friendship, and they are a vital part of the church community.

Jesus also reminds us that there are different reasons for celibacy. Some have been single from birth, while others were forced into it by historical circumstances, such as those who were made eunuchs to serve in royal households. Finally, Jesus introduces a third category: those who intentionally choose a vow of celibacy to serve God without interruption.

The reality is that once someone is married and has children, their primary ministry shifts to their household. Those who have chosen singleness are often able to serve God without these specific family obligations. Missionaries, evangelists, and priests, for example, often lead more nomadic lifestyles that allow them to serve freely. They can take risks and travel in ways that a married person simply cannot, as a married individual must always make decisions with their entire family in mind. We praise God for single individuals who serve the kingdom in amazing ways. Ultimately, singleness is not a curse, but a profound blessing for the kingdom of God.

Application

For those who are single:

Take a moment to reflect on how you can serve God in your current season. As you journal and talk with a trusted mentor, consider how you can take another bold step in your faith.

For those who are married:

If you know a single person who has been a blessing to you and serves Jesus in a unique way, reach out to them. Let them know how thankful you are for them and their dedication to Christ. Amen.

Additional Notes

“The disciples’ shock stems from Jesus’ stance on divorce being far stricter than what they had experienced in their society, where divorces were granted readily.^[1] When confronted with the permanence Jesus demanded in marriage, they reconsidered the entire commitment and concluded that avoiding marriage altogether might be the safer path.^[1]

Their reaction reveals how radically Jesus’ teaching departed from cultural practice. Jesus had just explained that Moses permitted divorce only because of human hardness of heart, and that anyone divorcing and remarrying commits adultery (Matt 19:1–12)—a position that left no room for the flexibility they had known. The Old Testament had permitted polygamy, divorce, and remarriage, customs God tolerated because of Israel’s sinfulness, but Jesus insisted that God’s original design called for one wife and no divorce.^[2]

The disciples recognized they were entering a demanding, uncompromising zone^[3] where marriage could not be treated as a temporary arrangement. Rather than embrace this vision of permanent commitment, they reasoned that celibacy offered the only way to avoid the risk of failing to meet such an exacting standard. Jesus affirmed their recognition of marriage’s permanence, agreeing it was not something to enter hastily or with expectations of an easy escape.^[1]¹¹

¹ [1] Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 1:311–312.

[2] Gordon J. Wenham, “Civil Law and Justice,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1:477.

[3] Thomas G. Long, *Matthew*, ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 217.

“Jesus states that not everyone can embrace this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. (Matt 19:10–12) The difficulty lies in understanding what “this teaching” refers to—whether Jesus means his uncompromising stance on divorce or the disciples’ suggestion that celibacy is preferable.

Jesus acknowledges that accepting celibacy as an alternative to risking a failed marriage is not universally possible; only those enabled by God to remain single without succumbing to sexual temptation can genuinely embrace it.^[1] This isn’t a matter of willpower alone but of divine enablement. Because celibacy represents a genuinely difficult life choice, Jesus recognizes that those capable of accepting this path are those to whom God has granted this capacity.^[2]

The teaching runs counter to deep cultural currents. Valuing celibacy contradicted Jewish cultural norms and expectations, where marriage was considered everyone’s obligation to community; Jesus’ teaching would have demanded a fundamental reordering of believers’ core values.^[1] More broadly, spiritual truths resist natural human comprehension—the person without God’s Spirit finds such teachings foolish and cannot grasp them because they require spiritual discernment. (1 Cor 2:14)

Jesus illustrates this principle through the eunuch metaphor. He identifies three categories: those naturally incapable of marriage, those made eunuchs by others, and those who have chosen celibacy for the kingdom’s sake. (Matt 19:10–12) The third group—those voluntarily embracing singleness—demonstrates that some choose to refrain from marriage to advance God’s kingdom.^[1] Yet this choice requires divine grace, not mere human determination. The teaching demands accepting a countercultural value system where kingdom priorities supersede conventional life expectations.”²

² [1] Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 1:312.

[2] Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020). [See here.]

“A biblical eunuch was fundamentally a physically altered male, typically created through a deliberate procedure to serve specific institutional functions. In Bible times, eunuchs were male servants in royal households who were often castrated as a precautionary measure, particularly when serving in a ruler’s harem.[1] This ritual castration was a common practice throughout ancient Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and Rome, used to eliminate the potential for court officials to consort with rulers or harems or to be seduced into sharing confidential information.[2]

The biblical understanding centers on physical reality, not identity or psychology. A eunuch was a male who lacked testicles, either because he was born that way or because he had been castrated.[3] This distinction matters: Jesus identified three categories—those who were eunuchs from birth, those made eunuchs by men, and those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 19:10–12) The third category involves voluntary celibacy for religious purposes, not physical alteration.

Legally and religiously, eunuchs faced significant restrictions under Old Testament law. Eunuchs were not allowed into the assembly of the Lord; according to Deuteronomy 23:1, any male who was a eunuch or injured in the genital region was excluded from entering the tabernacle or temple to worship God.[2] However, that ban was later removed[4], as Isaiah prophesied that eunuchs who kept God’s Sabbaths and held fast His covenant would receive an everlasting name better than sons and daughters. (Isa 56:3–5)”³

³ [1] Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, and R. K. Harrison, Thomas Nelson Publishers, eds., in *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1995). [See [here](#).]

[2] John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016). [See [here](#), [here](#).]

[3] Mark Allan Powell, ed., “Eunuch,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 265.

[4] Geo. B. Eager, “Eunuch,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 1037.