

# IT IS BETTER TO MARRY THAN TO BURN

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This statement is made in First Corinthians 7:9, “*But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*”

This verse, along with other verses in the chapter, have been greatly misunderstood and abused by many to teach things contrary to “sound doctrine” [cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:1] — everything from trying to justify a celibate life to sanctioning adulterous marriages. Second Peter 3:16 speaks of those who “*wrest the scriptures unto their own destruction.*” This is one such scripture.

In correctly understanding any passage, the context must be considered. The phrase, “*it is better to marry than to burn*” (v.9), is more correctly understood in light of verse 26 which says, “*...this is good **for the present distress.***” The “present distress” concerns the persecution and hardship of being a Christian that existed in that generation.

Paul was not saying that one can be a better Christian if he lives a celibate life. He was not saying that if you cannot live single then go ahead and get married “regardless” of your previous marital state. His words were regarding those who were free to marry. Only three categories of individuals have a right to marry:

1) those who have never been married (Heb. 13:4), 2) those whose spouse has died (Rom. 7:2), 3) those who have put away (divorced) their spouse because of their fornication (Matt. 19:9). Divorce and remarriage bears eternal consequences (Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:19-21).

Because of the difficulty facing Christians at the present time, it would be better to remain unmarried if they were not married. It is admittedly more difficult to attend to a spouse and children than it is taking care of only yourself. However, if they were married they were to remain married (v.10).

What then does the phrase, “*it is better to marry than to burn*” mean? The idea is that of “burning with lust.” Matthew 5:28 says, “*whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” At that present time (because of persecution against Christians), it was better to not be married. But, on the other hand, if one could not control their passions (“burning with lust”), it would be better to go ahead and get married.

This passage does not prove that everyone can get married “if they cannot contain.” It only regulates those who are “free to marry,” that is, have the right to marry.