

# 1 Corinthians 7:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.

## Analysis

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**But if they cannot contain**—the verb enkrateuontai (ἐγκρατεύονται, "exercise self-control") describes the ability to remain celibate without sinning. Paul's permission **let them marry** (gamēsatōsan, γαμησάτωσαν) is stated as imperative: marriage is the proper course for those burning with desire. **For it is better to marry than to burn** uses pyrousthai (πυροῦσθαι, "to burn").

The "burning" refers to burning with sexual passion, not burning in hell. Paul recognizes that unmet sexual desire creates intense struggle that can lead to sin. Marriage is not a concession to weakness but God's good design for sexual fulfillment. This verse directly counters ascetics who condemned marriage or required celibacy of all believers.

Paul's pragmatic counsel reflects his pastoral realism: attempting celibacy without the corresponding gift leads to porneia (fornication). Rather than setting an impossible standard, he provides a clear path: if you lack self-control in celibacy, marry. This honors both callings—singleness for those gifted, marriage for those who are not.

## Historical Context

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The Corinthian ascetics likely pressured believers to remain single or dissolve marriages for "spiritual" reasons. Paul's strong affirmation that marriage is

"better" than burning with unfulfilled desire protected vulnerable believers from unrealistic expectations that would lead to sexual sin.

## Related Passages

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**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

## Study Questions

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1. How does Paul's teaching protect believers from the false guilt of "burning" with sexual desire?
2. What does it mean that marriage is "better" than burning—why isn't Paul calling for heroic self-denial?
3. How can singles discern whether they have the gift of celibacy or should pursue marriage?

## Interlinear Text

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εἰ	δὲ	οὐκ	ἐγκρατεύονται	γαμῆσαι	κρεῖσσον	γάρ
if	But	cannot	contain	let them marry	better	for
G1487	G1161	G3756	G1467	G1060	G2909	G1063
ἐστιν	γαμῆσαι	ἢ	πυροῦσθαι			
it is	let them marry	than	to burn			
G2076	G1060	G2228	G4448			

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Timothy 5:14** (Parallel theme): I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

**1 Corinthians 7:2** (Parallel theme): Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.

**1 Timothy 5:11** (Parallel theme): But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry;

**1 Corinthians 7:28** (Parallel theme): But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

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