

Paul continues his permission for the virgins to marry speaking now to the virgin sister in the Lord. Note the benefits named for remaining single differ for sisters and brothers. For the man it is simply “how he may please the Lord.” For the woman it is “that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.” But for both, if they marry, there is distraction from wholly concentrating on the Lord. They (and rightly) must have sufficient focus on the things of the world to please their spouse.

But Paul cautions against the dangers of **impulsiveness in undertaking self imposed singleness.**

35 But I say this for your own profit; not that I may set a snare before you,...

There apparently was a practice among believers of making a voluntary lifelong commitment to serving the Lord, remaining single. Obviously Paul did. Widows were prone to also, particularly in the emotion of their recent bereavement. Paul cautions these in 1 Timothy 5. He sees a danger for them in making a solemn commitment to the Lord and then going back on it. We are to be faithful! Forsaking a promise would lead to a sense of failure and a bad conscience, ultimately to unseemly behavior if not repented of.

1 Timothy 5:3 Honour widows who are really widows; . . . 5 Now she who [is] a widow indeed, and is left alone, has put [her] hope in God, and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. 6 But she that lives in habits of self-indulgence is dead [while] living. 7 And these things enjoin, that they may be irreproachable. . . . 9 Let a widow be put upon the list, being of not less than sixty years, [having been] wife of one man, 10 borne witness to in good works, if she have brought up children, if she have exercised hospitality, if she have washed saints' feet, if she have imparted relief to the distressed, if she have diligently followed every good work 11 But younger widows decline; for when they grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, 12 being guilty, because they have cast off their first faith. 13 And, at the same time, they learn also [to be] idle, going about to people's houses; and not only idle, but also gossipers and meddlers, speaking things not becoming. 14 I will therefore that the younger marry, bear children, rule the house, give no occasion to the adversary in respect of reproach. 15 For already some have turned aside after Satan. (JND)

Anna in the temple at the time of the Lord's birth is an

example of one who made such a commitment and kept it, Luke 2:36-38. The early assembly looked after the widows, Acts 6. Dorcas is an example of a sister who remained single and wrought good. Her companions and coworkers were widows so perhaps she was also, Acts 9:36-41.

Paul is here clearing any doubts regarding remarriage of widows that otherwise may have tended to carry over from the Old Testament in the minds of the New Testament believers, especially those of Jewish heritage. In the Old Testament the priests were not to take a divorced woman to wife, Leviticus 21:7. The high priest was not to take a divorced woman or widow to wife, Leviticus 21:14. In the Millennium the priests are not to take a widow to wife except if she were a widow of a priest, Ezekiel 33:22.

Now **as to marriage of virgins** he reiterates the profit in remaining unmarried in order to attend upon the Lord without distraction. It is comely to do so. Yet despite his repeated urging this direction he does not want to cast a snare upon them. He does not impose celibacy upon those who wish to serve the Lord. Far from it. Yet some elements of Christendom have done just that and still do. This policy has caused untold grief and unspeakable evils, some of which are recently coming to light in the media. It has brought unspeakable blasphemy upon the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church (Assembly).

Another philosophy of the world, and especially the religious world, involves the idea that male and female sexual intimacy is evil in itself, even in marriage. Some with tender consciences in Corinth may have been influenced by this kind of teaching, **hesitating to marry**. Paul alleviates this concern as well, opening wide the doors to mature and wise decisions to marry. In the Old Testament a man was said to be unclean if his seed departed from him, Leviticus 15:16-18. From this people may have surmised sexual intimacy itself was unclean, even in marriage. But the seed itself is what is unclean because it transmits the sinful nature of Adam down through his progeny generation after generation.,

Psalm 51:5 Behold I was shapen in iniquity; in sin did my mother conceive me.

Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

1 Corinthians 15:22...in Adam all die.

The epistle to the Hebrews, who obviously are very familiar with the Law, states:

Hebrews 13:4 marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled....

There has been some confusion in interpreting verses 37-38. **Does Paul advocate arranged marriages?** Some translations look that way. Others don't. But which ever way one takes it is good. Paul does not insist upon arranged marriages here. But he does not preclude them either. I suggest it might be appropriate, if that is the established culture of the land. I would just observe that in our present culture, attempting to arrange a marriage is fraught with danger of conflict, frustration and perhaps long lasting family dissension.

Though I do not believe the apostle is mandating arranged marriages, that seems to be a pattern often seen in scripture. In any case, note the consistent giving of a daughter in marriage and of a man taking a wife throughout. See Genesis 6:2, & Matthew 24:28. Also, Abraham arranging marriage for Isaac, Genesis 24, implies at least obtaining parental approval. On the other hand Esau married without parental blessing, Genesis 27:46. Jacob arranged a marriage to one he loved, Genesis 29, and was deceived and tricked by a devious father-in-law in a corruption of the idea of parental arranged marriage. Other fathers offered their daughters in marriage as rewards for outstanding achievements or to cement treaties between tribes or nations. Caleb and King Saul are two examples. Even there the daughter's wishes influenced the father's decision. However the ultimate example, of course, is in God the Father arranging the marriage of His Son to the Bride first "purchased with the blood of His own [Son]," Acts 20:28. As I say, neither the Lord or the apostles mandate parentally arranged marriages or marriages arranged by the couple involved. Either practice is acknowledged and neither are condemned.

The simple directions given are that **one is to be mature and in control of his body and his emotions.** Self control is a characteristic of one exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23. While in control, one

can make a godly, wise, earnest, lifelong commitment to give up one's life and virginity to another. Paul sums it all up:

37 But he who stands firm in his heart, having no need, but has authority over his own will, and has judged this in his heart to keep his own virginity, he does well. 38 So that he that marries himself does well; and he that does not marry does better (JND).

That is the long and the short of it. Choose, but choose well. Single? Young and old, take it to the Lord. Go to Him earnestly and repeatedly for guidance whether to marry, and if so, to be led to His choice for you. It worked for me. But don't refuse to take counsel from respected, godly, wise people, including parents.

39 A wife is bound for whatever time her husband lives; but if the husband be fallen asleep, she is free to be married to whom she will, only in [the] Lord. 40 But she is happier if she so remain, according to my judgment; but I think that I also have God's Spirit. (JND)

Either marrying or remaining single is perfectly OK, but in Paul's judgement, remaining single for the Lord is happier. **Faithfulness in marriage is commanded** but remarriage is OK when the husband has died, although remaining single is better in Paul's personal judgement. But Paul humbly claims to be speaking as guided by the Holy Spirit of God. God has preserved Paul's statements in the inspired scriptures, and they are to be regarded as inspired. He is simply distinguishing between the Lord's own words recorded in the Gospels and the later inspired statements of His apostles and prophets (here Paul's).

May the Lord guide and bless us all in the realm of marriage considerations.

Notes by Ron Canner, April 9, 2003