

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 7:36-40

**Title:** Finishing up: Two More Questions about Marriage

**Truth:** Fathers, daughters, and widows are given sound Biblical guidance

**Date/Location:** Sunday July 19, 2020 at FBC

## Introduction

Our purpose in this series of messages on 1 Corinthians 7 is to inform us on God's design for marriage so that we can obey what God has said in this critical area and thus reflect the light of God's glory in this dark world. In light of the variety of circumstances that can occur in marriage, we need divine guidance.

### I. Fathers and Their Virgin Daughters, 7:36-38

- A. The issue has to do with a dad and his virgin daughter. It is not about a young man considering whether to marry.
- B. Evidently, sometime after he was saved, he made a promise to God to dedicate his daughter to Christian work and furthermore, to celibacy because it would help them do their work without distraction. Perhaps at that time she was young, and dad was zealous in saying that he was going to raise his children in such a way that they would know the gospel and be dedicated to missionary work or something.
- C. Obviously, the young lady would grow up knowing this, but eventually some other feelings could grow as her body changes and as she desires to have a love in her life, and children, and a home of her own. That is good and natural in a pure sense of the word *natural*. She has come through the "flower of youth" and is now mature and able to bear children. She is like a tree which has moved past the flowering stage to the fruit stage, mature in its capability. The flower indicates the coming of reproduction of fruit. Being "past the flower of her youth" means that she is in the mature age, at least mid to late teens if not beyond.

There are factors that dad has to keep in mind:

1. The girl's wishes. Dad does not lord it over her.

2. The temptation that she faces as a single person. This cannot simply be wished or decided or “vowed” away.
  3. Whether she is gifted to be single. If not, it would be unbiblical and cruel to keep her in her father’s house. If she is so gifted, then dad has to commit to support and protect her until he can no longer do so (and even beyond, with stored resources), because there will be no husband to take up that role.
  4. Certainly mom has some thoughts about this as well!
- D. If she then wishes to become married, and is struggling with temptation and contentment about the desires mentioned above, this puts dear old dad on the horns of a dilemma. There is a need: marriage would help his daughter in her spiritual life. But there is something else: it would mean that he has to break his promise to God. It seems as if he is behaving improperly toward her, but he doesn’t want to behave improperly toward God.
- E. Ecclesiastes 5:4 about fulfilling vows may even come to his mind, or other passages that teach the same thing (Num. 30:2, Deut. 23:21, Psalm 50:14). What has happened is that he has snared himself with words that he cannot fulfill. See for example Proverbs 20:25. Solomon advises that it is not good to be rash with your mouth—let your words be few—and don’t make such vows in the first place. This would have allowed Jephthah to avoid the problem he created for himself and his daughter (Judges 11:30-35—he was wrong that he could not go back in this situation, but he had sinned in rashly speaking his vow.)
- F. Paul responds to the dad that he can do what he thinks best. In this setting, such a vow can be broken without sin. His desire to dedicate his family to serving the Lord was a good one, but at the same time it was ill-advised because there is another human being whose spiritual and physical life is in the mix. That initial zeal, though commendable, was a sign of early immaturity in the faith.
- G. Verse 38 opens with the reassurance to this father that he does well to give his daughter in marriage.
- H. But there is another possible outcome mentioned back in verse 37. There are those fathers who do not find themselves in the “necessity” situation—that is, his daughter is not presenting a

desire for marriage—and who are OK with the obligation of caring for and protecting their daughters for the remainder of their lives. These still may have some tendency to wonder if they have done the right thing. But if they have so determined in their hearts to keep on that path, they also do well. It is not a sin either way.

- I. In fact, the second half of verse 38 says that the father who does not give his daughter in marriage does even better than the one who does give her in marriage. This is simply because of the truth of 7:32-35. But in neither case (to remain married or to remain in her father's house) is there a sin. I re-emphasize that constantly because I don't want you to get the idea that there is a superior spirituality or "higher plane" for those who can dedicate themselves to God's service in a celibate way. There is NOT. Each one has been placed in God's program for the world in his or her place with specific desires and personality, and God uses all of His people in their different circumstances.
- J. You can't help but notice the "happier/better" motif in this chapter:
- 1 Cor. 7:9 it is **better** to marry than to burn with passion.
  - 1 Cor. 7:38 he who does not give her in marriage does **better**.
  - 1 Cor. 7:40 But she is **happier** if she remains as she is [single], according to my judgment—and I think I also have the Spirit of God.
- K. There is no doubt that all of this sounds foreign and hard to our ears. We don't live in that kind of culture, so it is hard to understand how a father might have this kind of sway over a daughter. But note this: Paul did not bat an eye at it as if it were unusual. You might complain, "It shouldn't be so with a father and his daughter." But if you lived in a society where this was just the reality, you would have to deal with it. Paul is teaching them how to deal with it. (We have the same kind of thing: we live in a society with abortion and homosexual marriage. We just have to deal with it because we do not seem to have a hope to change the system.)

## II. Widows (and Widowers), 7:39-40

- A. Women very often outlive their husbands—one stat says that 80% of married women outlive their husbands. Thus, Paul focuses on “a wife” in verse 39. I believe the same exact principles apply to husbands who outlive their wives, just like the symmetry in the earlier parts of the chapter (7:4, 11, 12-13, 32-34).
- B. It is also more important for an unattached woman to find security in the world than for an unattached man to do so. This is a reality in much of the nations, again whether it seems right or not. An unmarried woman can be a target of predatory men. Indeed this *should not* be the case, but we live in the world we live in, not one populated by angels or the ideal one we have in our minds.
- C. Paul’s plain teaching here is that if the husband is alive, the wife should still be married to him. If he dies, she is free to be remarried, as long as it is “in the Lord.”
- D. The phrase “only in the Lord” is vital. It applies to all Christians, not just widows and widowers. **Our young people** must bake it into their minds NOT to get infatuated or involved with a non-Christian for ANY reason. It is not God’s will. It displeases God. Wait for a Christian person. You’ll be **happier** if you do! Dads especially, and moms have a real responsibility to protect their kids from going down a wrong path. Teach them to respect authority early on, and to not get involved with an unbeliever. Be involved in their lives enough, but not oppressively so, that you can talk to them openly about all these matters.

For a widow, it is important to not be in a hurry to get a new husband. Don’t be desperate, or look for a rich benefactor husband, or the coolest or most handsome, or even the first one that comes along. A faithful well-adjusted, hard-working Christian husband is what you need.

- E. Paul’s mature and Spirit-led judgment is that the widow would be happier if she can remain single. But that may not be feasible or desirable in her case, so this is not a hard and fast rule. And it is tempered by the teaching of Paul himself in 1 Timothy 5:14 that younger widows *should* marry, have children, manage the house

and not become a cause of reproach. She is to use her life productively, not wantonly or wastefully. Those household activities are far from a curse, as they are presented by the godless society today. They are in fact a *blessing*. It is a blessing to be married, it is a blessing to have children, and it is a blessing to be a worker in the home. *There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, and in fact it is honoring to God for a young woman to want to live like that.*

F. A couple of false ideas could creep in that would try to undercut this freedom to remarry after the death of a spouse. One is the false teaching mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:3 of the forbidding of marriage. The other is the doctrine of eternal marriage or “celestial marriage” which states that marriage is intended to last forever, not just for mortal life. That doctrine is heretical. We know:

1. This passage states that the woman is at liberty to be married to one she wishes to marry as long as he is a Christian.
2. Romans 7:1-3 shows that it is the common and correct understanding that a woman is bound to her husband while he lives, but if he dies, she is released from that law, and can give herself to another man. Human law has recognized this for millennia.
3. Matthew 22:30 demonstrates the point as well. The question of the Sadducees was wrongheaded not only because it was so wildly hypothetical, but also because they denied the truth of resurrection. But verse 30 says that after resurrection, people will not marry but will be like the angels. Angels do not marry.

Any mystical idea of a post-death attachment is inappropriate. Such an idea would hold you back from remarriage. A spouse who has died cannot hold you uniquely for him/herself after they die. That kind of jealousy and possessiveness is sinful, just like those attributes would be wrong before or apart from marriage. Demanding or considering a person to somehow belong to you when you are not married is just wrong.

G. The text says here and in Rom. 7:2 that a wife is bound by law to her husband while he is alive. That sounds like a strict standard. If

while he is alive, she leaves and becomes another man's wife, she is looked upon as an adulteress. That is certainly true if the husband was faithful and things were at least decent. If not, the fact remains that she is not with the man that she pledged herself to. (Again, symmetry with the husband's case is assumed.)

## **Conclusion**

Marriage is not a thing that is to be entered lightly or on the basis of mere emotions. Those will not last. There is a foundation of divine revelation—information from God—that will set your marriage on solid footing. But you both must truly follow what it teaches to have success!

The chapter indicates that a formula for success in marriage is that each married person focuses on pleasing their spouse (7:3-5, 33-34).

For now, we leave the topic after six messages.

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