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A1223 – June 3, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 7:36-40
To Give Or Not To Give In Marriage

Question: I won't phrase the whole question someone asked correctly because it was asked verbally, but it was a good question and basically it amounts to this: how does Paul's preference for singleness fit with the divine institution of marriage in Genesis 1 and the command to multiply? The answer, basically, is that we have an interim ethic during the Church age that is rooted in the spiritual gift of celibacy. Not all have the gift of celibacy but for those who do then singleness is desirable because it can maximize ministry opportunities. However, if you do not have the gift of celibacy, then you are back into the norm of the divine institution of marriage; having children, that kind of thing.

What Paul is doing is agreeing and disagreeing at the same time with a legalistic group at the Corinthian church. The legalists held that fulfilling the bodily desire to have sex was sinful and if you abstained from it then you would be more spiritual. Even if you were married you should abstain from having sex. Of course this was wrong. They also said if you were a virgin you should not marry at all, you should remain single. The problem Paul has is communicating that singleness is good but for different reasons than the legalist Corinthians advanced. First of all, Paul did not think that marriage was sinful; Paul held that marriage was good, but he did hold that it is better to remain single in this interim age because the time is short and you'll have greater freedom to advance the cause of the Lord. Paul saw certain advantages to singleness, advantages he himself enjoyed as a widower, but hey, if you don't have the gift of celibacy and you want to get married, get married.

Let's pick up with verse 36 today and here we have some translation differences. How many of you have the NASB? You don't have to worry

because your translation reflects accurately the original text. How many of you have the NIV? Okay, you'll have to make some changes. People have argued about the NIV for years, the main argument is it is less clear on the deity of Christ in the NT. I agree it has its shortcomings. But when you compare the NASB and the NIV you're really talking about apples and oranges not apples and apples because the NASB is a word for word translation and the NIV is a thought for thought translation. So the NIV takes liberties the NASB doesn't take. As far as accuracy is concerned, the NASB wins hands down. As far as readability is concerned, the NIV wins hands down.

The NIV and NASB differ here in vv 36-38 because the NASB makes the issue a father considering giving his virgin daughter in marriage but the NIV makes the issue a single man considering marrying his fiancé. But the view of the NIV really can't be maintained even though some good commentators hold it. But hey, all good commentators hold to some wrong things. And you just have to take the meat and spit out the bones. How do you know what's meat and what's bones? Well, you have to be able to get into the original text and you have to get into some historical background and you have to be able to use logic to see how it fits in the context. Not everybody can do that, some people can study history and do well enough in logic to work out most passages but some passages require use of the language. But then you have some people who can study history and use the languages but they are not very logical and they produce a lot of junk. Frankly, in my humble opinion it's better if a person can study history and is good at logically thinking through a text than knowing the languages and being weak in logically thinking it through. Of course it's best to have all three. But the bottom line is you can't solve everything by the languages and you can't solve everything by history and you can't solve everything by logic. You really need all three and even then there are some things you can't solve completely.

Now this one is solved by the languages and history. If you look at verse 38 the NASB says, **So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well**, the focus is on a father giving his daughter in marriage. But notice what the NIV says, **So then, he who marries the virgin does right**, the focus here is not a father giving in marriage but the man who marries the virgin, it says he does right. So the difference centers on the underlying Greek word translated by the NASB "gives in marriage"

and by the NIV “marries.” The Greek word here is *gamizo* and it means “to give in marriage” just as the NASB translates. It does not mean “marries” in any context as the NIV suggests. The word for “marries,” *gameo*, is actually in this same context at the end of verse 36 where both translations get it correct, translating it “to marry.” But *gamizo* in verse 38 means “to give in marriage.” So the NASB translates the passage more accurately to the original. The other issue that solves it comes from history. And this is the fact that fathers had to give their daughters in marriage, the father had full authority over his daughter, unless the father was a slave and then his authority was forfeited to the master and he would have to give her in marriage. But the father had *patria potestas*, absolute power as father of her *even after she married!* So strong was his power that after she married he could initiate a divorce! So the marriage custom of the day was that it was absolutely required that a father give his daughter in marriage. Men didn’t just go ask women to marry them without asking permission from her father. In our culture that custom is still around in a much weaker form but it would be good if it was strengthened, not to Roman *patria potestas*, but strengthened because fathers are responsible for their daughter’s safety, well-being and decision making until they get married, at which point those become the responsibilities of the husband. So both by language and by historical background the NASB catches the proper meaning of the text. The issue Paul is addressing is should fathers give or not give their daughters in marriage.

Now the text indicates there are two kinds of fathers here, one group of fathers has tentatively decided not to give their daughters in marriage due to some kind of outside pressure, probably pressure from the legalists at Corinth that somehow he would spoil her spirituality by giving her in marriage. The other group of fathers has firmly decided not to give their daughters in marriage independent of any pressure, this they have decided of their own will. So that’s the situation, what should these fathers do?

Verse 36 helps the first group of fathers decide. **But if any man thinks he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past the bloom of youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.** Let’s work with the translation some, it should end with “let them marry,” it’s a plural not a singular, “let her marry” is emphatically wrong, “let them marry” is correct. Here we have a very

hesitant father, he's very unsure about what to do. Notice the word **thinks**. **But if any man thinks he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin daughter.** The Greek word **thinks** is *nomizein* and means to form a tentative idea, to refrain from being definitive. These are fathers who for the time being have tentatively decided not to give their daughter in marriage but they also have an inkling that they're acting inappropriately. She's engaged to a man, some man has already asked for her hand and the father may have even said yes originally, but then some pressure came in, I suspect from the legalists, and this persuaded him to at least put it on hold. But he senses that he is acting inappropriately. He's really not sure. So what Paul is going to do is help him make a decision in the will of God. So **if he thinks he is acting inappropriately toward his virgin daughter**, and it's a first class condition which is a statement of reality, if and it is true, there are fathers at Corinth who think this, and **if**, second statement, **if she is past the bloom of youth**, this is a third class condition which means maybe she is, maybe she's isn't, it's a 50-50. But **if she is past the bloom of youth**. Now what is the **bloom of youth**? What age is this? The Greek word means past her prime, past her sexual peak, when she becomes irresistible to a man. I find this very interesting because there is a time when a daughter reaches this point, she's fully developed and at her most irresistible time, it's a window of time. It usually occurs about age 16-20. In Rome women married between the ages of 15-20, the men were about 25 and this is also when the Book of Proverbs prefers women to marry, which, as you've already concluded, is much younger than most young women marry in the West today. But that's when they wanted to marry in the ancient world because it was when she was the best looking, it was time to just envelop yourself with her (sexually) and really fall in love with her, it was when she was most fertile for having children, it was when she was still moldable, formable for you and so forth. There are a ton of practical reasons for early marriage and that's what Paul is referring to here, **if she is past the bloom of youth**? We'd say, if she's 21, 22, she's moving past the bloom of youth, these aren't hard and fast ages but there is a window of time called the **bloom of youth** and that's when she is in her prime in all the areas I mentioned.

Now of course, in America the average age a woman gets married in our decade is 26. It's been rising for decades. For example, in 1960 the average age was 20. Now it's 26. So there's been an increase of about 1 year per decade over the last 50 years. There are a lot of factors involved in why the

average age has been climbing and I haven't done all the research. I would encourage some of you to do this because we need to understand what's going on so we can instruct our daughters in the right way, why we're inclining them in a certain direction, why the culture is moving in this direction. If you look at the research the first reason you find for marrying later is selfishness. Since women have come into the workforce, after WWII and particularly after birth control in the 1960's, they now want to reach career goals, make money and put off marrying and having children; that's one trend you can follow, increased selfishness. That goes for the men too, all around we've become a more selfish society. A second trend for marrying later is the dumbing down of America, neither men nor women are intellectually or emotionally ready; they are far behind men and women of prior decades because the standards of education have been lowered so dramatically since the 1850's. The War Between the States resulted in a dramatic shift in education standards and they've been decreasing ever since, so a second trend you can follow is lowering standards of education resulting in lack of intellectual and emotional readiness at an earlier age. A third trend contributing to marrying later is the rejection of Bible teaching in the Church; this affects their spiritual readiness. Since the 1920's the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy really destroyed the teaching of the Bible in America's churches, and consequently we have millions of young people growing up with less theology than the average bartender in 1850. And that means they are just not spiritually ready to marry at age 20. Finally, a fourth trend I'll mention that contributes to marrying later is economics, the increasing economic problems. The fact is the American economy was strongest in the mid-70's, that's when it peaked and since then the economic struggle causes people to delay getting married for economic reasons, they live longer at home, they don't get married and consequently they go **past the bloom of their youth**.

Now those are just a few of the contributing factors to the rise in average age of marrying. And now we want to look at the consequences. There are a number of consequences and I'd encourage you to think this through and do the research yourself. I think you'll find there are some positive consequences but I'm not going to go through them because if the four reasons above are handled properly by Christians, then the positive consequences could be attained at an earlier age. So I'm just going to mention two very devastating consequences to marrying later in life. First of all, population growth decline. Maybe you know that to keep a society from going extinct you have to have a

birth rate of 2.11 and no country that falls below has ever recovered, they have all gone out of existence. This may surprise you since we've been inundated with the scary tactics of the environmental movement that threatens us with the dangers of population growth. But it may equally surprise you that the father of this radical agenda, Paul Ehrlich, wrote in his book *The Population Bomb*, "Americans should go childless, or limit themselves to a single offspring, as an act of patriotism." In other words, helping our country go out of existence is the ultimate act of patriotism. This guy is nuts. He wants the world population to come down to 300 million. Well, we'd have to get rid of 6.4 billion people to do that. And in fact, that's what environmentalism is all about; it's about the destruction of 6.4 billion people, what they call "sustainable levels." Abortion and birth control are just some of the means environmentalists are using to try to reduce population to sustainable levels. So there's a lot intertwined here. But what effects are there on population when we marry late? Two things. First of all, we have less children because we've already moved past the primary birthing years which are the early 20's. Second, we create a generation gap because instead of having children at 20 we have them at 35 and if you do the math you'll see a whole generation of people missing. Then we have major economic problems because you don't have as many workers pouring in to SS and you have a lot of people retiring and so the burden economically on the workers becomes too much to bear and the whole economic system crumbles. Lack of people effects progress in every field; it affects the number of discoverers who can discover resources, it affects the number of people who can develop new technology, it effects dramatically economic growth. One negative consequence of marrying late is population growth decline. The second negative consequence is increase in fornication, more people stumble and have sex outside of marriage because here are these young men and women running around, the men have testosterone raging through their bodies, the young women look unbelievable, it's a formula for disaster. They have reached the age of marriage but for the reasons mentioned beforehand they don't marry, so they fornicate. So it's my humble opinion, as a Christian and as your pastor, to train our young children not to be selfish brats, erect new education standards that reflect earlier times, attend churches with content rich bible instruction and the economics of it will work its way out.

So if, and we're back to the expression **if she is past the bloom of youth**, we'd say in the 1st century culture this is age 20-21, **and if it must be so**

which is more correctly translated, **and it ought to happen**, these two ought to get married, they are engaged and you have an inkling as a father, they should get married. In that case, then **let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let them marry**. There's no reason at that point to hold them back from marrying, let them marry, go ahead, there's nothing sinful about giving your daughter in marriage. They had been told by the legalists they would be sinning. But Paul assures them, you are not sinning, you are not missing the mark, **let them marry**.

Now verse 37 and we come to the other group of fathers, these are not in a tentative decision; they have made a firm decision not to give their daughter in marriage. **But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well**. In other words, if the father is firmly settled in his conviction to not give her hand in marriage then he should stick with his convictions. Why might he be convicted of this? Because she has the gift of celibacy. She has no desire to get married. She just wants to serve the Lord. In that case the father should stand firm. Notice, it says **being under no constraint**. That word means pressure, that is, no one has pressured him into this conviction, by which he means the legalists. They were telling fathers not to give their daughters in marriage because that would destroy their opportunity to really be spiritual. Baloney says Paul. But if he decided to keep her without any pressure from the legalists, **having full authority over his own will, and he decided this in his own heart, he will do well**.

So then the father who gives his daughter in marriage does not sin and the father who keeps his daughter does not sin either. This is not a matter of sin. The matter here is doing what is right for the daughter. Should she marry or should she not marry. It's very simple.

As verse 38 declares, **So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better**. You do know why he does better don't you? Because now she can rub his feet too. So he can have his wife rub one foot while his daughter rubs the other. How good is that? And it's good for them too because now each of them only has to rub one foot and not two. And if you wash your feet guys, it's even better for them, they really like that. So, that's

why I'm not giving my daughters in marriage. The key to happiness in life is always having your girls around to rub your feet.

No, in all seriousness, you can see that giving your own daughter in marriage is not a matter of right or wrong, it's a matter of doing good and doing better. Now this is what is very interesting, a man who does not give his daughter in marriage will do better. How will he do better? Well I don't know, surely she would be a lot of help in the home to her parents, but it seems in context Paul says it is better in light of the present distress of verse 26 and the fact that the time has been shortened, verse 29. Surely she would be a great help in whatever ministry the family carried out.

Finally we come to verses 39-40 where Paul gives a final word for married women. Verse 39, **A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.** Starting in verse 39, **a wife is bound**, the word **bound** means a legal constraint or tie, she is legally bound to her husband **as long as her husband lives**. Again, a marriage requires two components. First the legal contract and this is spelled out in the marriage vows. The wife promises the husband certain things, the husband promises the wife certain things, the vows are made to each other before God. He is the one who joins a man and a woman in marriage, it's not the pastor, it's not the state, it's God who joins a man and a woman in marriage. What does the Scripture say over and over? "What God has joined let no man separate." Men do not put other men together in marriage, only God has ever done that. So if you ask me to marry you, technically I can't do that, all I can do is guide and give structure and ceremony to the marriage God performs. And second, the consummation, the joining of the two in intimacy, at that point, technically the two are married and they are **bound** as verse 39 says for life. Marriage is for life. This is why remarriage while the husband is still living is adultery. Turn to Rom 7:2 for the use of this word again. Now here the main idea is not marriage but the Law, the believer's relationship to the Law of Moses. He's trying to show them that since we through faith in Christ died to the Law, we are now free from it so that we might be joined to Christ. That's the main point. To illustrate the main point he uses marriage. Notice verse 1, "Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a

person as long as he lives? 2For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. 3So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.” Now the main point and the illustration are a perfect analogy. As unbelievers we were bound to the Law, but having believed in Christ we died to the Law in order that we might be joined to Christ. But you cannot be joined to Christ and the Law at the same time. That is impossible. By analogy, as married to a husband you are bound to him, but if he dies then you die to him and then you can be joined to another husband. But being joined to husband A and husband B at the same time is adultery while both are still living. So then Paul is saying the same thing here in Romans that he is saying in 1 Cor 7, if you marry someone you are bound to them until they die, after that you are free to marry another, but if you marry someone else before they die, you are an adulterer or adulteress. So the essence of adultery is being married to two people at the same time. And as I said before, with divorce rates skyrocketing over the last several decades we really need to impress upon our young people the permanency of marriage and work very hard to help them make good choices in choosing a spouse. Marriage is not a game, it’s not an experiment, it’s very serious and it lasts for life, whether you get a legal divorce down at the court house or not. God is the one who joined you together and no man can separate you because no man put you together. God joins people and God severs people and He severs them at death. The implication is that there is no marriage in heaven but we are like angels. That’s a doctrinal implication and it is clearly taught in the Gospel of Matthew. For those of you who love your spouse and want to be married to them in heaven, don’t worry because while you can’t be married to them in heaven you will love them more and they will love you more than you ever loved each other here, and there will be an eternity of memories to form then and there.

Returning to 1 Cor 7:39 so we can talk about remarriage. The Bible has a place for remarriage. Verse 39, **but if her husband is dead**, and really that uses the metaphor sleep, **if her husband falls asleep**, metaphor for death, implying resurrection, always the metaphor for death, sleep, implies waking up, the implication is lost when you translate it **dead** so mark that out and put **falls asleep**.

So if her husband falls asleep, she is free to be married. What frees a Christian to remarry? Their spouse falling asleep, it's true for both males or females, here he's just addressing the females but it's true for both, **she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.** And we have something else interesting, **only in the Lord.** What does this mean? It means she can **only** marry **a believer.** Now maybe you've heard someone say, we can't know if someone is a believer or not. Now I submit to you that is completely baloney talk. The argument sounds all pious, well, we can't see into their heart, so we don't know and the discussion is always about someone who is living a really obnoxious life. Can I tell you that is just plain ridiculous and anti-biblical to say that. The NT assumes you can know, otherwise how could Paul say only marry in the Lord. If I really can't know then that statement is meaningless, but also Paul says in Phil 4:3 that certain people's names are written in the book of life. And I guarantee you Paul didn't go up to heaven, sit down and read the book of life. That's not how he knew. You can know who's a believer and who's not. It's real easy and if you have doubts then go find out, ask them how to keep from going to hell and the first words out of their mouth will tell you if they are a believer or not. Don't go to them and say, do you believe in Jesus Christ? Then all they have to do is say yes or no and people will lie just to get you off their back. So just say, how do you keep from going to heaven or how do you go to hell, that'll throw them, and if they say anything other than belief in the Lord Jesus Christ then you know emphatically they are not a believer. So, as I said it's assumed everywhere in the NT you can know who is a believer and who is not. And here's another place, a woman contemplating remarriage after her first husband fell asleep can only marry a believer. Well how can she know that? What if she messes up and she thought she was marrying a believer but he wasn't a believer. That is a stupid scenario because it assumes the Bible says you can't know when it says you can know. And if you don't know, go ask them the questions I suggested and you'll find out because someone can't be a believer if they don't understand the gospel.

Now Paul knew how important it was to marry a believer. So turn to 2 Cor 6:14-18. And as we turn there, don't date an unbeliever either, it ought to be a line in every young man and young woman's book, I will not date an unbeliever. In fact don't even date a believer, you don't date period because that doesn't even make sense biblically. Courtship makes biblical sense.

That means you can be friends and be in friend settings and talk and learn about each other and figure out, hey, is this someone I would like to marry. Those thoughts will come to mind and if the young man wants to marry her he should make his intentions known to her father first, then the young man should go to the young woman and say, I'd like to pursue you for marriage. I've spoken to your father, let's purposefully consider together whether we should marry, then if so, he should ask her to marry him, he should promise to keep her pure, will you have me and then see what she says. That's the way it's supposed to be done biblically.

Now, when we come to this passage everyone interprets it in terms of marriage; actually it has to do with all kinds of partnerships that cause Christians to compromise with paganism, but we're just going to look at it in terms of marriage. "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵Or what harmony has Christ with Belial," that's a name for Satan. "Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God;" Now think about this, do you really want Satan as your father-in-law? Why would you ever purposefully marry an unbeliever? Even Plutarch recognized that the marriage can't be happy if you don't believe the same thing. So the main idea is you don't have the most basic thing in common.

Now this does not apply to those who were unbelievers when they married and then later one of you married so you are now in a mixed marriage. As the believer you are to stay married to them. What this is referring to is if you are already a believer then you should only marry a believer. So remarriage is an option for widows and widowers, **only in the Lord.**

Verse 40, **But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.** In my opinion, Paul seems to speak from his own personal experience, and I said before I think Paul was a widower, it just sounds like it's implied. I'm not dogmatic about it, the NT doesn't come right out and say, it just hints in that direction and I think he was. His opinion is **she is happier** or more fortunate, it's a comparative adjective, remaining single in Paul's opinion is better. And the chapter closes with his statement, **and I think that I also have the Spirit**

of God. So what does this mean? Certainly it does not mean that he **thinks** that he has the indwelling **Spirit of God**. Paul knew that all believers have the indwelling Spirit of God. And the word **think** refers to something probable, not certain, something you think is probably true. The only other parallel in the book is 1 Cor 2:16 where Paul said of himself and other mature believers, “but we have the mind of Christ.” To have the mind of Christ then would be to have the Spirit of God’s point of view on a matter, God’s perspective. Although it hasn’t been revealed to Paul directly, he’s reasoning from other truths that have been revealed and formulating a corollary truth. Again, he’s not 100% sure but in light of the times having been shortened he formulated the corollary truth that a widow would be more fortunate to remain single. But it is not at all wrong to re-marry as verse 39 says. So Paul puts forth his opinion but he recognizes that the only thing directly revealed is that she can remarry because the marriage bond is broken at the time of her husband’s death. And that’s it for chapter 7. I’ll probably review briefly next week so if you have questions on chapter 7 I’ll be glad to field them and then we’ll move into chapter 8, the issues of food and idols, more interesting issues.

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