

"Only In The Lord"

1 Cor. 7:39, 40

Introduction.

1CO 7:39 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.

1CO 7:40 But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

- Paul expresses an “opinion” that the widow would be better off not to marry because of “the present distress.” (1 Cor. 7:25, 26). Under different circumstances he advised widows to marry. (1 Tim. 5:14).
- “I think” is from “dokeo” [dah keh oh] and is not a word of uncertainty, but of persuasion. (1 Cor. 10:12; Jas. 1:26).

1. This passage is a difficult and there have been several interpretations of it.
2. This study will take a look of some of these interpretations.

Interpretation 1 - A widow must marry only a Christian

1. 1 Corinthians 7:39 clearly sets forth that a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. (1 Cor. 7:39).
2. This is also clearly set forth in Romans 7:1-4.

ROM 7:1 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?

ROM 7:2 For 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.

ROM 7:3 So 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.

ROM 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God.

3. The above verses sets forth the ideal state - the general rule (marriage is for life).
4. They do not take into consideration two exceptions for divorce and remarriage. (1 Cor.7:15; Matt. 19:9; 5:31,32).

1CO 7:15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

1CO 7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

Verse 16 is a statement indicating there was doubt the unbelieving mate would change and be saved. They should not feel guilty if the unbeliever chose to leave.

MAT 19:9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." “porneia” [pahr nay ah] denotes sexual immorality in general.

MAT 5:31 "And it was said, 'Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce';
MAT 5:32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

5. The Bible teaches a widow is free to remarry. (1 Cor. 7:39).

6. The “younger widows” were encouraged to remarry. (1Tim. 5:14)

1TI 5:14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;

7. She is permitted to marry "only in [the] Lord." (1 Cor. 7:39).

8. The words "in [the] Lord" usually denote a Christian - one who is in union with Christ. (Phil. 3:1, 4:4; Eph. 6:1,10; 1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:18,20).

9. The words can have the meaning of "according to God's plan or design, by divine appointment, as the Lord directs."
a. See 1 Cor. 11:11.).

1CO 11:11 However, **in the Lord**, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

b. See Interpretation 2

10. What is the meaning of the words "in the Lord" here?

a. Many or most think it is a periphrasis (use of many words when one or a few words would do) meaning "Christian."

b. They contend that a widow must marry a Christian who is free to marry.

c. Here are some ways that some translators have rendered these words.

1) "So long as he is a Christian" - Gspd.

2) "Provided the marriage is within the Lord's fellowship" - NEB

3) "Except he must be a Christian" - Wms

4) "But he must belong to the Lord" - NIV

11. Many extend 1 Corinthians 7:39 to refer to Christian widowers, but this extension is not commanded or implied by this verse.

12. They contend the Greek word "monos" [**mah** nahs] is used here as an adjective and modifies the words "to whom."

a. Adjectives modify nouns, pronouns, and adjectives.

b. It is affirmed the man the Christian widow marries must be "in the Lord" (a Christian).

c. Some try to extend this commandment to all Christian women. (1) Those who have never married. (2) Those who are divorced, and are free to remarry. (3) Those deserted by unbelieving mate, and are free to remarry.

d. Some try to extend this command to all women either Christian or non-Christian.

1) There is no evidence unbelieving widows were bound by this commandment.

2) This would mean that the unbelieving widow must marry a Christian.

Questions

1. If the widow is to marry a Christian, why is not the same requirement placed upon a young female saint who is marrying for the first time? Many women, especially younger women, are not nearly as wise and mature as many widows.
2. If the widow is to marry only a Christian, why is not the same requirement placed upon a woman who has been divorced, but is free to remarry? Nothing is said here about a divorced woman.
3. If the widow is to marry only a Christian, why is not the same requirement placed upon the Christian man or woman who has been deserted by their unbelieving mate? Paul said "the brother or sister is not under bondage" (1 Cor. 7:15), but nothing was said about whom they could marry.
4. If the widow is to marry only a Christian, why is not the same requirement placed upon the Christian widower or the Christian male who is marrying for the first time?
5. These questions do not disprove Interpretation 1, but they do make one wonder why this restraint would be placed only on Christian widows and none other.

Interpretation 2 - A few expositors hold this verse means to marry only as the Lord directs.

1. The words "in the Lord" can mean "according to God's plan or design, by divine appointment, as the Lord directs." (1 Cor. 11:11; Col. 3:18). Thayer, p. 418; Vine, Vol. III, p. 139.

1CO 11:11 However, **in the Lord**, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

COL 3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting **in the Lord**.

- a. "But from the Lord's point of view" - Wms.
 - b. "Nevertheless, in <the plan of> the Lord and from His point of view" - Amp.
2. It is argued that it is not fair to require the Christian widow to marry a Christian when this is not required of others.
 - a. Christian men in general
 - b. Christian widowers
 - c. Christian divorced men free to remarry.
 - d. Christian women in general
 - e. Christian divorced women free to remarry.

* There is no evidence this commandment was given to those listed above.

* It must be assumed. It is not commanded or implied.

3. They interpret the words "in the Lord" to mean this.

- a. She must not marry an unscripturally divorced person.
- b. She must not marry someone married to another.
- c. She must consider the danger of mixed marriages. (2 Cor. 6:14).

2CO 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

4. They point out that the Greek word "monos" [**mah** nahs] can be used as an adverb or adjective.

- a. The masculine form of the word is used as an adjective meaning "only" or "alone". (Matt. 4:4; 21:21; 4:10; 17:8; 1 Cor. 9:6; 14:36; Phil. 4:15; Col. 4:11; 2 Jno. 1; Jno. 5:44; 17:3; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15,16; Jude 4,5; Rev. 15:4).
- b. The neuter form of the word "monon" [**mah** nahn] is used as an adverb meaning "only." (Matt. 5:47; Jn. 5:18; 11:52; 12:9; 13:9).

MAT 5:47 "And if you greet your brothers **only**, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

JOH 5:18 For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not **only** was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

JOH 11:52 and not for the nation **only**, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

JOH 12:9 The great multitude therefore of the Jews learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake **only**, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.

JOH 13:9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet **only**, but also my hands and my head."

5. It is affirmed that the word "monon" [**mah** nah] would more naturally be used as an adverb since it appears in the Greek text after the words "to be married."

- a. Adverbs modify adjectives, verbs, or other adverbs.
- b. Lit. "free she is to whom she wishes to be married, only in Lord."

6. Some translations favor this view.

- a. "Only in a Christian way" - Ber.
- b. "Let her be guided by the Lord" - Phillips.

Interpretation 3 - Some hold the view that this verse means that a widow must remain a Christian and remember her Christian duties.

1. Very few expositors hold this view, but it is the view that presents fewer problems and fits the whole of the New Testament.
2. The word "only" is used as adjective and modifies the pronoun "she" rather than "to whom."
3. It would mean that the widow was free to marry whoever she wishes (assuming he was free to marry), but she must remain a Christian and remember her Christian duties and responsibilities when she takes such a step.
 - a. This interpretation understand the words "in the Lord" to refer to the Christian widow.
 - b. The words could mean she is to be guided by the Lord in marriage. This is the same basic idea of Interpretation 2.
4. The widow who listened to this admonition most likely would be led to marry a faithful Christian who would help her get to heaven.
5. The words "in the Lord" elsewhere refer to the person who is being exhorted. (Phil. 3:1, 4:4; Eph. 6:1,10; 1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:18, 20).

Some Additional Remarks

1. I have always admonished every Christian (including Christian widows to marry a faithful Christian), not just one who has only been dipped, and warn ed of the danger of marrying unbelievers.
2. Serious problems often arise when a Christian marries out of Christ or marries an unfaithful Christian.
3. It is not absolutely certain God has made it a hard and fast law that the Christian widow must marry a Christian.
 - a. The New Testament reveals that some Christians (and perhaps many) were married to unbelievers [non-Christians]. (1 Pet. 3:1, 2; 1 Cor 7:11-16.).

1PE 3:1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,
 1PE 3:2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

1CO 7:12 But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away.

1CO 7:13 And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away.

1CO 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy.

1CO 7:15 Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.

1CO 7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

- b. Christians are not instructed to separate from or divorce their unbelieving [non-Christian] mates.
 - c. These marriages may have occurred before or after the Christian's conversion.
4. The Christian widow or any other Christian who loves Christ and desires to please Him will think long and hard before they marry one who does not belong to Christ. See warning 1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14.

5. Serious problems usually arise when one marries outside of Christ.

6. Paul warned against being "unequally yoked" with unbelievers. (2 Cor. 6:14).

2CO 6:14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

- a. The words "unequally yoked" referred to a man mismatching or yoking a larger animal to a smaller animal. (Deut. 22:10). This was injurious or deadly to the smaller animal.
- b. He was not talking just about marriage in 2 Corinthians 6:14.
- c. He was cautioning the Christian about his relationships with unbelievers in business, friendships, marriage, and in every other relationship.

7. Marriage to an unbeliever is dangerous and one can find himself/herself mismatched and injured or destroyed by the relationship.

8. This is a warning of the danger of forming intimate and inconsistent relations with unbelievers.

- a. This is a warning of danger, but no absolute prohibition.
- b. Christians can and must have contact with the world. (Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Cor. 5:9,10; Mk. 16:15; Gal. 6:10; 1 Cor. 7:12-15; 1 Pet. 3:1,2).
- c. The Christian widow and every other Christian should remember he/she is a member of Christ's body and not forget his/her Christian duties and responsibilities in regard to marriage and in regard to every other relationship to unbelievers.

Questions

- What if a father or mother is not a Christian?
- What if one's child is an unbeliever?
- What if one's grandparents are unbelievers?
- What if one's master or employer is an unbeliever?

Some Observations

- There is no evidence that a Christian must avoid these unbelievers and has no responsibility to them.
- There is no evidence that God does not (1) recognize the marriage of a Christian widow to a non-Christian man (2) or she must separate from him (3) or the congregation where she attends must rebuke, discipline in any way, or withdraw fellowship from her.
- There is no evidence this marriage was regarded as an adulterous marriage or an inferior marriage or a contaminated marriage.
- I do not know of any congregation that has disfellowshipped or rebuked a widow for marrying a non-Christian.

Closing Remarks

1. Each of us should continue to study and pray about this matter.
2. It is a subject of great importance and should never be taken lightly.

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