

Question:

In 1 Corinthians 7:36, the Apostle Paul teaches that if a man sees that he is not treating his virgin daughter properly, he should allow her to marry. What exactly does this mean? What is the overall message of this passage?

Answer:

To understand this well, let's look at the passage starting a bit earlier, from verse 34:

"There is a difference, however, between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But she who is married cares about worldly things, how to please her husband. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away."

(1 Corinthians 7:34-31, ESV)

Paul is giving pastoral advice about marriage and singleness. He encourages believers that while marriage is honorable and not sinful, singleness allows for undivided devotion to God's work without the worldly distractions that marriage can bring.

Paul is not issuing a command that everyone must remain unmarried but rather presenting a practical wisdom: singleness can be a spiritual advantage for those called to serve the Lord fully (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

He then addresses parents, particularly fathers, who have virgin daughters at home. The Apostle advises that if the father wishes for his daughters to remain single to serve the Lord without distraction—and if he himself can control his own desires (i.e., he is not pressuring them to marry for worldly reasons)—this is commendable and spiritually beneficial.

“But if anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his virgin daughter, if she is past her youth, and if he is giving her in marriage, he does well. Let him who gives his virgin in marriage do so with the consent of the virgin, and let him not be at peace with himself who has no such practice.”

(1 Corinthians 7:36-38, ESV, paraphrased)

This passage teaches us that:

- Parents, especially fathers, may encourage their daughters to remain unmarried to serve God wholeheartedly if that is the calling and if they are able to master their own desires.
- However, if the father perceives that he is not treating his daughter well by holding her back from marriage—perhaps because she has passed the age of youthful innocence or she desires to marry—he should not force her to remain single but should allow her to marry without guilt. Doing so is not sinful.

- The emphasis here is on loving leadership and spiritual wisdom, not legalistic control.

Theological Insights:

Paul's teaching is grounded in the understanding that marriage and singleness are both gifts from God, each with its own purpose in the economy of God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 7:7). Singleness, when chosen or maintained by God's grace, is a calling to undistracted devotion to Christ (cf. Matthew 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35). Marriage, likewise, is honorable and serves God's purposes in companionship, procreation, and mutual sanctification (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Paul's counsel about virgin daughters reflects the cultural context of his time, where family honor and parental authority were significant. However, the spiritual principle transcends culture: believers are called to discern God's will for their lives, whether in marriage or singleness, and to respect individual freedom and God's leading.

The "man who guards his virgin daughter" is thus one who lovingly shepherds her spiritual well-being, guiding her to live a holy life in body and spirit (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5), while also respecting her personal

calling and readiness for marriage. If she is ready and willing, the father's love will release her to marry without guilt or shame.

Practical Application:

- For parents: Encourage your children's spiritual growth and respect their God-given calling, whether that leads to marriage or singleness.
- For young believers: Seek God's will earnestly for your life's path, and live in holiness and devotion to Him, regardless of marital status.
- For the church community: Support both married and single believers, recognizing the diversity of gifts and callings within the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8).

Conclusion:

Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7:36 is a balanced and compassionate approach to the tension between parental responsibility, individual

freedom, and spiritual calling. The father who “guards his virgin daughter” well is one who, empowered by the Spirit, lovingly guides her toward a life of holiness, whether that means remaining single to serve the Lord or entering into a godly marriage.

May the Lord bless you richly as you seek to live wisely according to His Word.

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