

“Single and Complete”

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“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.” (1 Cor 7:38)

Read 1 Cor 7:25-38

In light of the pressing needs all around him and his personal devotion to the work of the Lord, Paul found being single to be better suited to the work than being married. Paul's personal word on this (vv. 6, 10, 12, 25, 40) is not contrary to what the Lord said, only in addition to what the Lord verbal stated during His earthly ministry. What Paul says is what the Lord would have said had the Lord commented on these particular areas.

Yet how do we reconcile Paul's idea in 1 Corinthians 7 with Genesis 1:31 and 2:18?

Genesis 1:31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

In Genesis 1:31 the statement concerning the word "good" speaks of completion, of moral goodness. In 2:18, the word "good" is one of degrees. He is not speaking of its morality, only that if His design for what lies ahead is to be completed, man must have a counterpart. The word for good is the same in both references.

In light of this, why does it sound as if Paul is arguing for being single over against marriage? Let us consider the Genesis narrative first.

The Genesis narrative lives inside of a historical and theological context.

First, it is before the fall of mankind into sin. Neither Adam nor Eve will have a sinful nature thus making their relationship perfect with no barriers in communication, contentment, and expectations.

Second, the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth demands that a man and a woman exist in the context of the marriage covenant.

Third, there are no spiritual barriers between the individual and God or each other. Spiritually they are one.

Thus, the idea in Genesis 2:18 is not that being married is better than being single, but being single will not fulfill the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Hence Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7 is not against Genesis 2:18. He makes his statements in light of three ideas.

First, there is no procreation mandate today. We are not commanded to be fruitful,

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multiply and fill the earth. You can if you so choose, but it is not commanded of you.

Second, because of the fall of mankind into sin, relational conflict is inevitable. You are going to have to work at all relationships, especially marriage. Paul notes this in 7:28.

Finally, because of the fall everything about life is problematic. Genesis 3:16-19 assures us of this fundamental idea.

All of this is true, but there is still a more fundamental reason as to why Paul calls some to remain single and it is so that they might give themselves to serving the Lord.

The contrast between well and better is not one of morality or righteousness, it is one of opportunity. The single person has the opportunity to serve God with undistracted devotion. The married person has different opportunities in serving God, but they are not the same as the single person.

The single person is to celebrate their present non-marital position by serving the Lord without distraction. Thus it is possible to be single and happy at the same time. May WBC strive to be a place where the single person finds rest, shelter, protection, and service to their Lord and Savior.