

Dear Anbu,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know what the correct meaning was for 1 Corinthians 7:36.

“But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age [old enough to be married], and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not; let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.” (1 Corinthians 7:36-38) (AKJV)

There has been a debate over the translation and meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38. One view involves a father or male guardian deciding whether to give his daughter or female ward in marriage. The evidence for this view are the words “to keep his own virgin [in his household]” rather than give her in marriage.

The second view refers to a single man deciding whether to marry the woman to whom he is engaged. We believe this is the preferred view since it seems odd to use the word “virgin” if “daughter” or “ward” is intended. As further proof, the phrases in the above verses are used consistently elsewhere in this chapter to describe considerations appropriate to the engaged couple themselves. (See 1 Corinthians 7:9; 28; and 39.) It should also be noted that verse 25 of chapter 7 starts a new section concerning “virgins.” The context of this verse suggests the word “virgin” is referring to both males and females who have never had physical relations. The next verse (1 Corinthians 7:26) says that it is good for a man to be this way (a virgin). 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, 32-33, and 36-38 all speak to males about this subject of virginity. Therefore, we believe the entire section of 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 is talking about the virtues of remaining single, whether male or female. Widows and widowers would also fit this category even though they had previously had sexual intercourse. The Apostle Paul would have them also consider the virtues of remaining single.

What is the correct meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:36? We believe the Apostle Paul is speaking of a man having trouble keeping his virginity with his betrothed. Therefore, Paul’s instructions that he had given earlier in the same chapter (1 Corinthians 7:8-9) would apply. “Let them marry.” We hope we have answered your question. Be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio