

1 Cor. 7:39-40 (WCF 24:3-4) “Marriage ‘In the Lord’”

For the Children: Perhaps at your age some of you think about getting married when you’re older and say, “Ooo, boys!” “Ooo, girls, yuk!” When you are older you might think differently. The Lord might lead you to be married, or to remain single. If you marry, there might come a time when you find yourself “single” again, perhaps towards the end of your life. Whatever way the Lord leads you, it is most important to obey His Word, trusting in His mercy through the Lord Jesus. His Word teaches us what kind of person we should marry, how to act when married and how to act when single. **Questions:** What does it mean to marry “in the Lord”? What kinds of marriages are forbidden by the Lord? What are some of the blessings of being single, and of being married?

Introduction:

First Point: The Blessed Christian Couple

- **A Wider Application:** The text speaks not only of widows, but also of the wife being bound while her husband lives. Perhaps she is singled out because he often dies first, or because men at that time were often the ones to walk out. But the text assumes that marriage is indissoluble while both are alive. That principle applies to married couples as well as widows who wish to re-marry
- **“In the Lord”:** Similarly, that marriage must be “in the Lord” applies to all believers who wish to marry or re-marry. The phrase means that the marriage must be to someone whom the Lord approves and in a manner of which He approves. This is the only way to have a blessed marriage
- **To a Fellow-Believer:** As to the kind of person approved as a marriage partner for a believer, both OT and NT make it clear the person must be a fellow-believer. See Ex. 34:15-16; Dt. 7:3-4; Josh. 23:12; Judg. 3:1-8; Mal. 2:11-12; 2 Cor. 6:14 etc. This is the basis for repeated covenant-commands and warnings. The WCF interprets “unequally yoked” to warn against any marriage-relationship that will not help uphold the “true *Reformed* religion”
- **Other Forbidden Categories:** Marriage “in the Lord” must also avoid forbidden categories such as the incestuous relationships forbidden in Lev. 18 and 20. These include both “blood” relations and “in-law” relations, to the same degree. The OT “levirate law” was an exception. Mk. 6:18 and 1 Cor. 5:1 show that these laws still apply. The original form of the WCF stated this more clearly. Same-sex marriage and marriage to someone unlawfully divorced (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:7-9) are also forbidden. Christian marriage should also involve 2 people who can make vows, and hold marriage in honour, “in the Lord” (Heb. 13:4), hence professing members
- **Life in the Fear of the Lord:** Marriage “in the Lord” is more than choosing someone in an acceptable category. It means working together to worship and serve the Lord, in the grace of Christ; treating each other as befits those “in the Lord” and helping each other to resist attacks upon the marriage

Second Point: The Blessed Christian Widow

- **Can Widows Be Blessed?:** Widowhood is not easy – there is grief and loneliness. Yet there are still blessings, by God’s grace. The term “happy” in v. 40 refers to that blessedness
- **Bound and Free:** Marriage is binding while one’s spouse is alive, but death dissolves the bond. A widow(er) may remarry. See Rom. 7:1-3
- **Remaining “As Is”:** However, the apostle advises remaining as you are, if you can be content. See also vss. 8, 10, 17, 24, and 26. It is the contentment with godliness that leads to a “happier” situation (1 Tim. 6:6). There is also blessing in the unique opportunity for service to God undistracted by concerns about family (vss. 32-34). That is not to say that married couples have an inferior blessing. The apostle also gives this as inspired advice, not command (v. 25), because of the persecutions of that time (v. 26). Whatever one’s status – married, single or widowed – blessedness lies in being “in the Lord,” serving Him faithfully in His grace and strength

Conclusion: