

1 Corinthians 7:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.

Analysis

So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well—the verb *gamizōn* (γαμίζων, "giving in marriage") confirms Paul is addressing fathers arranging daughters' marriages. *Kalōs poiei* (καλῶς ποιεῖ, "does well") affirms marriage as good. Paul has consistently maintained marriage's legitimacy (vv. 2, 28, 36); his preference for singleness does not diminish marriage's honor.

However, **but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better** (ho mē *gamizōn* *kreisson* *poiei*, ὁ μὴ γαμίζων κρεῖσσον ποιεῖ). The comparative *kreisson* ("better") indicates relative advantage, not moral superiority. Given the "present distress" (v. 26) and advantages of undivided devotion (vv. 32-35), singleness is "better" in a practical sense.

Paul's careful language protects both callings: marriage is "well" (*kalōs*), singleness is "better" (*kreisson*). This reflects the chapter's consistent message: both are good, both are gifts (v. 7), but singleness offers practical advantages for ministry. The choice depends on gifting, circumstances, and calling—not moral ranking.

Historical Context

Paul's comparative language ("better") was sometimes misinterpreted by later ascetic movements as establishing hierarchy between celibacy and marriage. However, Paul's context (urgent times, ministry focus) shows he means practical

advantage, not moral superiority. Both callings glorify God when lived according to gifting.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's language of "well" versus "better" prevent hierarchy while acknowledging practical differences?
2. In what circumstances today might singleness be "better" for focused ministry?
3. How can the church honor both callings without elevating one as morally superior?

Interlinear Text

ὅστε	καὶ	ό	ἐκγαμίζων	καλῶς	ποιεῖ·	ό	δὲ	μὴ
So	then	G3588	he that giveth her	well	doeth	G3588	but	not
G5620	G2532		G1547	G2573	G4160		G1161	G3361
 ἐκγαμίζων κρεῖσσον ποιεῖ·								
he that giveth her	better		doeth					
G1547	G2908		G4160					

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:4 (Parallel theme): Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

1 Corinthians 7:37 (Parallel theme): Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast 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.

1 Corinthians 7:8 (Parallel theme): I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.

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