

1 Corinthians 7:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

Analysis

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth—the verb *dedetai* (δέδεται, "is bound") uses legal marriage-bond language (v. 27; Romans 7:2). Paul reaffirms marriage's permanence: the covenant lasts until death. This echoes Jesus' teaching (Matthew 19:6, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder") and reflects Genesis 2:24's one-flesh union.

But if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will. The phrase *eleuthera estin hō thelei gamēthēnai* (ἐλευθέρα ἐστὶν ὁ θέλει γαμηθῆναι, "she is free to marry whom she wishes") releases widows from the marriage bond. Death severs the covenant, freeing remarriage. Paul qualifies: **only in the Lord** (monon en kyriō, μόνον ἐν κυρίῳ).

"In the Lord" means marrying a fellow believer. Paul forbids believers marrying unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers"). This protects spiritual faithfulness and family unity. Widows may remarry freely, but only Christians—ensuring shared faith, values, and devotion to Christ.

Historical Context

Widows in the ancient world often faced economic vulnerability, making remarriage necessary for survival. Paul's teaching that widows are "free" to

remarry affirmed their dignity and provided security, while the qualification "in the Lord" protected spiritual integrity and Christian household structure.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's teaching on marriage's permanence until death shape Christian views on divorce and remarriage?
2. What does it mean that widows are "free" to remarry—why does Paul emphasize their liberty?
3. How does the qualification "only in the Lord" protect widows' spiritual faithfulness and family unity?

Interlinear Text

Γυνὴ	δέδεται	νόμῳ	ἐφ'	ὅσον	χρόνον	ζῇ	ό
The wife	is bound	by the law	G1909	as	as long	liveth	G3588
G1135	G1210	G3551		G3745	G5550	G2198	
ἀνήρ	αὐτῆς	ἐὰν	δὲ	κοιμηθῇ	ό	ἀνήρ	αὐτῆς
her husband	her	if	but	be dead	G3588	her husband	her
G435	G846	G1437	G1161	G2837		G435	G846
ἐλευθέρα	ἐστὶν	ῳ	θέλει	γαμηθῆναι	μόνον	ἐν	κυρίῳ
at liberty	she is	to whom	she will	to be married	only	in	the Lord
G1658	G2076	G3739	G2309	G1060	G3440	G1722	G2962

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 7:10 (References Lord): And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband:

1 Corinthians 7:15 (Parallel theme): But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.

Malachi 2:11 (References Lord): Judah hath dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah hath profaned the holiness of the LORD which he loved, and hath married the daughter of a strange god.

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