

1 Corinthians 7:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.

Analysis

But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment—the phrase *kata syngnōmēn* (κατὰ συγγνώμην, "by way of concession") has been interpreted two ways:

1. Paul concedes that marriage is allowable though singleness is preferable, or
2. Paul concedes that temporary abstinence is allowable (v. 5).

Context favors the second interpretation.

Paul is not diminishing marriage's goodness but clarifying that his permission for brief, consensual abstinence is a concession, not a command. He does not require couples to practice periodic abstinence for prayer; it is optional. This distinguishes Christian liberty from legalistic prescription. The contrast with *epitagēn* (ἐπιταγήν, "commandment") emphasizes Paul's pastoral flexibility.

Throughout this chapter, Paul carefully distinguishes between divine commands (vv. 10-11, quoting Jesus), his own authoritative apostolic teaching (vv. 12, 25), and personal judgment offered with the Spirit's guidance (v. 40). This verse reflects his nuanced approach: marriage is good, temporary abstinence is permissible with safeguards, but neither is mandated.

Historical Context

Paul writes with apostolic authority yet demonstrates humility in distinguishing his inspired counsel from direct dominical commands. This approach reflects the early

church's developing understanding of how apostolic teaching related to Jesus' explicit instructions during His earthly ministry.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does Paul's distinction between "concession" and "command" reveal about Christian liberty in non-moral matters?
2. How should believers approach areas where Scripture gives permission but not prescription?
3. Why is it important that Paul distinguishes between his own teaching, Christ's commands, and pastoral concessions?

Interlinear Text

τοῦτο	δὲ	λέγω	κατ'	συγγνώμην	οὐ	κατ'	ἐπιταγὴν
this	But	I speak	by	permission	and not	by	commandment
G5124	G1161	G3004	G2596	G4774	G3756	G2596	G2003

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 8:8 (Word): I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

1 Corinthians 7:25 (Word): Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.

1 Corinthians 7:12 (Parallel theme): But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.

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