

Must a Christian widow only marry a man who is a Christian, or can she marry a man who is a non-Christian?

Thank you for writing such a provocative question.

It is interesting to note that marriage and weddings are not a work given to the church. It's like death and funerals: they are governed by truths eternal, and not much by directives to the church.

However, it is a clear and unqualified teaching to the church that widows should remarry, according to 1 Tim 5:14-15:

14 So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. 15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

Young widows cannot be cared for by the church, leaving them in a precarious situation if they do not remarry. So certain are the scriptures that there is an age qualification given before the church can support a widow. 1 Tim 5:9-10:

9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

In 1 Cor 7 in his instruction on marriage he taught that even under the extreme circumstances of 1 Cor 7:8-9, widows should marry rather than burn with passion:

8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. 9 But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

The difficulty comes in 1 Cor 7:39-40 where Paul seems to place a condition on widows marrying:

39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. 40 **In my judgment**, she is happier if she stays as she is — and **I think** that I too have the Spirit of God.

Since this is advice — indicated by the qualification: “In my judgment” — it cannot be held as a command that must be obeyed or else sin will result. Paul’s advice is further complicated by his saying, “I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” Since Paul was clearly uncertain about inspiration of the Spirit on this issue, one would clearly be binding where the Bible does not bind to take the position that a Christian widow must be remarried only to a Christian man. Advise it, we may; command it, we may not.

One further thought on the development of 1 Cor 7. In the early part of the chapter Paul is certain as to what is scriptural and what is advice. 1 Cor 7:5-7 is clearly advice and not a command:

5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 I say **this as a concession**, not as a command.

Again, 1 Cor 7:12-14 is clearly Paul’s opinion and “not the Lord.”

12 To the rest I say this (**I, not the Lord**): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 And if a woman has a

husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

It appears that these statements which clearly admit to being advice are grouped around the idea expressed in 1 Cor 7:25-27:

25 Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but **I give a judgment** as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. 26 **Because of the present crisis, I think** that it is good for you to remain as you are.

Paul, who seldom, if ever, resorted to opinions, is clearly giving them out as they relate to his judgment based on the present crisis. The tenor, the tone, and, indeed, the very language of his advice that Christian women marry men who belong to the Lord is conditioned and motivated by the present crisis:

39 A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. 40 **In my judgment**, she is happier if she stays as she is – and **I think** that I too have the Spirit of God.